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Building Brand Equity on the Internet Case:Massidea.org

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Today the development of technology and the application of the Internet have led to a free and global environment for the exchange of information, which enables the mass production to be implemented by any manufacturer and the same service to be offered in most places in the world. Companies are no longer able to obtain competitive advantages by only producing products or offering services, but also require branding to add more value to their products and services. Massidea.org, as a newly introduced social media platform, faces the inevitable competition with other companies who also provide social media services. It is necessary for Massidea.org to utilize the Internet to build brand equity and create more added value to their own service.

The main purpose of this thesis is to discover how to build and strengthen brand equity within the Internet environment by achieving a high level of brand awareness and creating a favourable and positive brand image, which are two major sources of brand equity. The key research question is to discover how to create strong brand equity by improving brand awareness and brand image utilizing the Internet as a tool, supported by other marketing communication tools.

The theoretical context of this paper is mainly based on theories of brand building and management, including Internet branding and marketing communication. As the thesis will focus on building brand equity online, the relationship between the different theoretical concepts will be discussed.

The research method used is that of quantitative research. The research questionnaire was designed following the theoretical concepts related to brand building and management, internet branding and marketing communication. The research was conducted within three universities of applied sciences that were willing to participate in the research process.

The research results reveal that Massidea.org has achieved only a low level of brand awareness and its public image is relatively inferior and negative. The main reasons for these problematic symptoms include the lack of utilization of multiple effective marketing communication options and the faulty performance of the service under the brand name.

In order to successfully build brand equity online, it is favourable if the case project team can realize the value and significance of utilizing the Internet for branding, but also use other supportive marketing communication options at the same time. Nevertheless, only relying on a high level of brand awareness and favourable public image will not be able to guarantee the success of the brand, and its service performance, which is at the core of a positive brand image, should be improved substantially.

Key words Brand equity, Brand awareness, Brand image, Internet

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1. Introduction

1.1 Study Background

The American author Thomas Friedman (2007, 51) in his book “The World is Flat” states that the whole world has been being flattened by 10 forces since 9th November 1989. These 10 flatteners are ‘The fall of the Berlin Wall’, ‘The application of the Internet and data storage in digital form’, ‘Work flow software’, ‘Uploading’, ‘Outsourcing’, ‘Off-shoring’, ‘Supply-chaining’, ‘In-sourcing’, ‘Informing’ and ‘The steroids’. According to Friedman (2007, 51-59), the globalization of the economy started with the collapse of the last communist regime in Europe and then follows the globalization of culture with the application of the Internet and data storage in digital form. The direct consequence of globalization on both economy and culture is a new commercial reality which leads to the emergence of global markets for standardized consumer products. As Friedman states (2007, 9-11), the application of the Internet and digitalized data enables the possibility of sharing public and personal information, documentation and even certain technical know-how.

Those enterprises that manufacture good physical products or provide reliable services unquestionably had competitive advantages before the process of globalization commenced because of the disequilibrium of productive forces which was caused by the unbalanced development of technologies and the scarcity of information exchange. According to Theodore Levitt, an American economist and a professor at Harvard Business School (Aliber & Click 1999, 249-251), before globalization began, the world had the characteristic of a seller’s market. At that time, consumers did not have so much choice. In order to satisfy their own needs or wants they had had to purchase products or services from those enterprises who own the technical know-how. But when globalization started, a force, namely a combination of the improvement of technologies and the development of the Internet has driven the whole world toward a converging commonality, where communication, transportation and travel have been proletarianized and the imbalance on the development of technologies have been relatively balanced. Nowadays, the Internet and technological improvement enable the consumers to access anything they want; it has made previously isolated places and relatively poor citizens eager for the allurements of modernity; via new technologies, information exchange online and standardizing the manufacturing processes, the same product can be produced by any manufacturer and the same service can be offered almost in most of the places in the world; in other words, consumers have more choices than before and it is no longer possible for those enterprises to obtain competitive advantage only by producing products and offering services because the world market presents the characteristic of a buyer’s market.

In a buyer’s market, the product or service itself is no longer crucial in order for an enterprise

to obtain competitive advantage, but instead this is achieved through using branding and effective marketing.

1.2 Case Brief

Massidea.org is an online social media platform which is developed based on the crowd-sourcing theory and expressly designed and crafted for users from all over the world to share their daily challenges, ideas and visions of the future. It is also an ongoing project under the provision and coordination of Laurea University of Applied Sciences and funded by European Social Fund (ESF). The predecessor of massidea.org was the OIBS project or the Open Innovation Banking System. This project was initiated in 2008 and was rewarded as the best school-related innovative solution by the Finnish Inventor Support Association. Massidea.org is the first social media platform in Finland which is created not only for socializing and online communication but also for solving people's daily problems and boosting individuals' innovation and creativity through information exchange flow with others. By the end of 2009, nearly 700 users in nine partner universities of applied sciences and three partner universities were involved within this ongoing project. Massidea.org has four major target groups, including the educational sector, business sector, public sector, and individual sector. This social media platform can be adopted by each target group for different objectives. For instance, in the educational sector, Students promote their capabilities and know-how when performing studies via Massidea.org. Teachers are enabled to participate in a global, multicultural learning environment by sharing studying tasks with other teachers around the world via this online social media platform. To the business sector, certain business owners or marketers are able to obtain an access to alternative insights provided by numerous students without limitations of imagination, and a possibility to contact future employees and test collaborative open innovation development in a secure environment. For the public and private sector, this online social network can be utilized as an economical and structured way to collect and express opinions, as well as a channel for direct democracy. (What is massidea.org? 2010)

1.3 Purpose of this Thesis

Concerning the attribute of the case project, namely an online social media platform, the purpose of this thesis is to discover how to strengthen the brand equity within the Internet environment by creating a strong brand awareness and a positive brand image which are two major sources of brand equity. The key research question is to discover how to create strong brand equity by improving the brand awareness and brand image utilizing the Internet as a tool, which is supported by other marketing communication tools. This study will also be put into practice in order to solve the practical problems and utilized to assist the case project team achieving their expected objective in both brand awareness and brand image online.

1.4 The Brief of the Research Approach

The author was doing an internship and working as a marketing developer and a graphic designer in the Massidea.org project. The main task of the author is to help promote Massidea.org to the public by using marketing communication knowledge; to design and edit the website user interface, power points, brochures, roll-ups and newspaper illustrations using graphic design skills and brand building knowledge in order to create a well-designed outfit of Massidea.org and pass a fresh and positive visual look to the potential users online. The quantitative research method, which includes questionnaires as a means to conduct research, will be adopted in this thesis. Based on the results of the study, the author will be able to help the case project team improve and strengthen the brand awareness and brand image. The finding and suggestion based on the result of the research results will be offered to the case project team as the reference of their brand building strategy in the future.

1.5 Theoretical Approach

In this thesis, the author mainly focuses on three study areas which are considered to be relevant in the theory. These three study areas include areas of brand building and management, marketing communication, and Internet branding.

The section on brand building and management will cover mainly the concept and significance of brand equity, and 2 major sources of it, namely brand image and brand awareness. In the section on marketing communication, the applying and deploying of multiple supported marketing communication tools, which are used to support internet branding, will be discussed. Using internet as a marketing and branding channel will be discussed in the internet branding section.

1.6 Structure of this Thesis

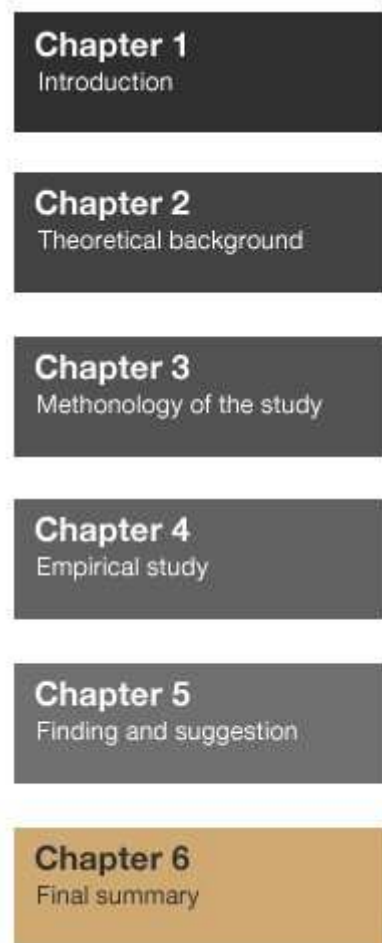


Figure 1 Structure of the thesis

As Figure 1 shows above, this thesis consists of 6 different chapters starting with the introduction section and ending with the final summary.

In the first chapter, namely the introduction section, readers are presented with a brief of the whole thesis containing the study background, basic information of the case project, the purpose of this thesis and the research approach adopted by the author in this paper and the study areas involved.

The second chapter, namely the theoretical section covers the theoretical background to the key research problem and the research perspective of this thesis. They primarily refer to the concept of brand image and brand awareness which are considered as two sources of brand equity; the value and advantages of utilizing the Internet as a marketing tool strengthening brand image and brand awareness, and approaches that can be adopted to build a strong brand within the Internet environment.

In chapter 3, the research method which is used to support the research approach in this paper will be described and interpreted to readers.

Chapter 4 is expressly for the empirical study in which the information and description on the case project and research results, as well as analysis of them will be presented and explained to readers.

The fifth chapter will present the findings and suggestions, which will lead to a final brand management plan for the case project, based on the analysis upon the research results which are included in chapter 4.

The last chapter will provide readers a final summary that summarizes the whole thesis.

2. Theoretical Background

In this thesis, all the information which is related to brand building, marketing communication and internet branding is primarily sourced from literature in order to establish a theoretical foundation supporting the author's empirical study. A detailed discussion of the theoretical foundation will be presented below.

2.1 Brand and Brand Equity

As Kevin Lane Keller (2008, 2) who is a professor of marketing at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College states in his book "Strategic Brand Management", In the modern world, there is a reality which has been acknowledged and realized by more and more enterprises and other organizations, either business-related or non-business-related. The reality is that one of the most valuable assets of a company is the brand name which helps existing and potential consumers associate the company with the products and services they offer. In Professor Keller's opinion (2008, 2-3), the reason why a brand plays a significant role is because the business world today is increasingly complicated. There are more choices toward various products and services for individual customers and business managers but contrarily, less time for consumers to choose them. Professor Levitt (Aliber & Click 1999, 249) also points out that the development of technologies has fertilized the growth of various categories of products and services. This is no longer an era when a firm or an organization is able to obtain competitive advantages only by relying on product or service itself.

2.1.1 The Concept of Brand

The use of a brand, used to refer to a specific brand name, has been considered an approach to

distinguish products or services which one firm offers from those of others. According to the American Marketing Association (AMA), the definition of a brand can be expanded to include various single elements such as a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination including all of them. Technically speaking, when any new name, logo, symbol or design created by a marketing developer emerges in the market, a new brand has been created. (Keller 2008, 2)

However, in certain practicing managers' opinions, the AMA's definition of a brand has its own limitations. Those managers think that the AMA's definition covers only the exterior forms of expression and a brand shall mean more than that. As they see it, a brand shall include 2 major manifestations both in exterior and internal aspect, and internal manifestations include certain amount of awareness, reputation, prominence and so on that a brand can create in a marketplace. (Keller 2008, 2)

Despite different understandings of the definition of a brand, the word "brand" appears as a neutral noun. Numbers of marketers have argued that a good brand is able to function as a "lifesaver" of their products and services, but a brand's appearance will not always be positive, sometimes it will appear with a relatively negative appearance before existing and potential consumers. A brand can be created by any marketer, but the possibility to make an ordinary brand a good one relies on the positive interaction between the consumers of the brand the proprietors of the brand. More precisely, proprietors of a brand can be defined as a brand's subjects and consumers of brand can be considered the objects of a brand, a brand is the combination of those exterior appearances such as logo, slogan, design etc and internal values such as awareness, reputation, imagery, which the subjects offer to the objects and then being recognized and acknowledged by objects. The status of this offering and acknowledging process decides the status of a brand. (Brand 2008)

According to Professor Keller (2008, 3-5), in order to clearly define a brand, a comparison between brands and products should be made. Concerning a product, he defines that a product is anything which can be provided to a marketplace for obtaining attention, acquisition, utilization or consumption that satisfies consumers' needs or wants. Thus, in his opinion, the categories of products can be widely expanded from physical goods such as foods, automobiles and all other physical consumer goods; services such as banking, airlines, insurance firms and so on; to certain persons such as political figures, entertainers or popular athletes and places including cities, states and even countries. Table 1 indicates 5 levels of meaning for a product defined by Professor Keller based on the features and functions of different product categories.

Level 1. The core benefit level	The core benefit level is the fundamental need or want that consumers satisfy by
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	consuming the product or service.
Level 2. The generic product level	The generic product level is a basic version of the product containing only those attributes or characteristics absolutely necessary for its functioning but with no distinguishing features. This is basically a stripped-down, no-frills version of the product that adequately performs the product function.
Level 3. The expected product level	The expected product level is a set of attributes or characteristics that buyers normally expect and agree to when they purchase a product.
Level 4. The augmented product level	The augmented product level includes additional product attributes, benefits, or related services that distinguish the product from competitors.
Level 5. The potential product level	The potential product level includes all the augmentations and transformations that a product might ultimately undergo in the future.

Table 1. Five levels of meaning for a product (Keller 2008, 3)

For most firms and manufacturers, it is easy to produce satisfactory goods at expected product level, thus makes most competition takes place at the product augmentation level in numbers of marketplaces. Concerning the feature of the augmented product level, it is crucial for enterprises adding more additional value which can be acknowledged by consumers and utilized to differentiate their products or services from those of other competitors. Also as Professor Levitt (1960, 45-46) has argued that the competition about what the firms produce in their factories will no longer emerge, instead a new competition about adding value to their factory output in the form of advertising, packaging, services, customer advice, financing, delivery arrangements warehousing and so on which will be highly valued by consumers will take place among each competitors.

Therefore, when a brand has been introduced to a marketplace, it means more than a product, because a brand bears multi-dimensions which can help distinguish it in certain aspects from other products and services which are expressly designed and crafted to satisfy the same need of consumers. (Keller 2008, 5) As professor Kapferer (2004, 11) concludes: “A brand is a name that influences buyers.”

2.1.2 The Concept of Brand Equity

Brand equity, also known as brand assets, has been considered one of the most popular and potentially significant concepts in marketing areas since 1980s. Concerning this new conception at that time, its emergence has had both a positive and negative effect on marketing strategies for a number of marketers. For marketing developers, the positivity of the emergence is that it provides marketers with a relatively effective tool to elevate the significance of the brand in marketing strategy and a focus which is able to be concentrated for marketing developers and researchers on managerial interest and certain research activities; The negative side of its emergence is this concept has been defined in various ways for various objectives, and discovering a common viewpoint that conceptualizes and measure it is difficult. (Keller 2008, 37)

A number of observers and researchers have attempted to reach a consensus about the concept of brand equity and most of them agree that certain intangible assets, which generate and affect marketing effects that are uniquely attributable to a brand, are major factors of which the brand equity consists (Keller 2008, 37). A strong brand is able to influence the market and customers with the power which is endowed by its brand equity. (Kapferer 2004, 11)

As research into brand equity develops, certain marketing researchers have been aware of the relationship between customers and the brand equity. Thus, a new concept called “Customer-Based Brand Equity” (CBBE) has been introduced by Professor Kevin Lane Keller to the public. According to Professor Keller (2008, 48), the fundamental premise of the existence of customer-based brand equity is that in a marketplace what customers have learned, felt, seen and heard about the brand as a consequence of their consumption experiences over time will directly affect the power of that brand which influences customers’ consuming behaviour towards the brand itself. In other words, creating the power of a brand is a mutual process requires the participation both of marketers and consumers interactively. Marketers are responsible for choosing various elements in order to build a new brand and then passing a tangible brand appearance to the customers, customers respond based on what has been created by those elements in their mind.

Professor Keller (2008, 48-49) defines the customer-based brand equity as a new concept

approaches brand equity from the perspective of both individual and organizational customers. In his opinion, the customer-based brand equity is “the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand.” In other words, customer-based brand equity refers to a comparison between the amount of marketing effects and outcomes of a product or service which is properly branded and those of a same product or service but is not branded at all. More precisely, it is believed that when numbers of customers respond more positively and favorably to a product or service and its marketing way when this brand is identified than it is not, the positive customer-based brand equity will be formed around this brand.

Actually, Professor Keller is not the only one who has realized the customer-based concept when conceptualizing the brand equity. Certain business researchers even expand this customer-based definition of brand equity in terms of both financial considerations and customer perceptions of the brand. For example, Jean-Noël Kapferer (2004, 10), who is a professor at HEC Paris, also being considered an internationally acknowledged branding expertise and Europe’s leading authority on brand management, indicates that customer-based brand equity is the preamble of the financial equity of the brand. A brand is not able to create financial value without the existence of customer-based brand equity because customers’ consumption behaviour which affects a brand’s financial value will be affected by those assets, such as brand image, brand awareness and so on which are considered the major sources of customer-based brand equity. Not only Professor Kapferer, William Moran, who is an American marketing executive also defines brand equity as the marketing effects generated by a specific brand name or any other elements, which will affect the future earning potential, which are linked to customers’ behaviour towards this brand, of products or services that are sold under the brand name. (Elliot & Percy 2007, 82)

2.1.3 Significance of a Brand Both to Consumers and Firms.

As Professor Keller indicates (2008, 48), the process of building a powerful brand is mutual and requires both consumers and firms to participate interactively, which means that the meaning of brand to both consumers and firms is profound.

For consumers, brands play various roles in their consumption process and daily lives, also provide them with various significant functions. Table 2 shows the 7 main roles brands play in consumers’ lives.

FOR CONSUMERS

Identification of source of product

Assignment of responsibility to product maker

Risk reducer
Search cost reducer
Promise, bond, or pact with maker of product
Symbolic device
Signal of quality

Table 2. Role that brands play for consumers (Keller 2008, 7)

As table 2 shows, a brand is able to be utilized to identify the maker or source of a specific product or service and the assignment of responsibility is possibly to be assigned to a particular manufacturer or distributor. On the other hand, a brand also can be considered a shorthand device or an approach to facilitate the process of consumers' product decisions because consumers can easily discover which brand satisfies their needs, fulfill their expectations and which one is not based on the past experiences of consumption with the brand over the years. If a brand can successfully be recognized and its brand knowledge can properly be recalled by consumers, this brand works as a search costs reducer for consumers both internally and externally. As an internal search costs reducer, a brand allows the consumer not have to engage in a large amount of extra thought; externally, it allows consumers not have to process a large amount of information to compare with other similar products or services and facilitates their decision making process. (Keller 2008, 6-7)

Professor Keller (2008, 8) not only defines the relationship between brands and consumers from the perspective of responsibility and obligation but also expands the meaning which is imbued in brands to consumers as a type of bond or pact. In order to create a more positive brand equity and make consumers react favorably to products or services under the brand name, a brand shall behave in certain ways and adjust itself to consumers' expectations and keep providing consumers, both individual or organizational, with utility by offering consistent product performance and certain appropriate distribution programs and marketing actions such as pricing, promotion and so on. In return, consumers' trust and loyalty will be constantly offered to the brand and ultimately become financial value.

Certain consumers would like to project their own self-image by utilizing specific brands as symbolic devices or presentation approaches to present their different portrait and sense of value. For instance, millionaires would like to choose those expensive and luxurious high-end brands to distinguish their living standards from the others; environmentalists intend to choose those brands claimed to be environment-friendly in order to present their sense of value; a group of conservative nationalists prefer domestic brands rather than foreign ones. In this sense, brands will be of assistance to people in helping them define who they are and helping people communicate that definition to others. (Keller 2008, 8)

For consumers, the most important roles brands play are the signal of quality and the risk reducer especially when processing their product decisions. Professor Keller (2008, 8-9) indicates that there are 6 types of risk in consumers' purchasing and consuming process, namely the functional risk, physical risk, financial risk, social risk, psychological risk and time risk. The functional risk occurs when a product or service fails to perform up to consumers' expectations; certain products or services, which are considered threats to consumers' physical well-being or health because of their immanent defects, will cause physical risk; financial risk means the consumption goods or services are not worth the price paid; when a product or service leads to an unpredictable embarrassment from the others, it is believed that this product causes social risk; psychological risk occurs when a product or service affects consumers mentally and negatively; time risk means the failure of products or services leads to a loss of opportunities to discover and purchasing other satisfactory products or services. Apparently, there are various ways for consumers to manage these risks; one of them is to purchase products or services offered under well-known brands because those well-known brands may be particularly significant signals of quality and other attributes to consumers.

There are numbers of valuable functions with which provided by brands to firms as well. Table 3 shows 6 roles brands will play for firms.

FOR FIRMS
Means of identification to simplify handling or tracing
Means of legally protecting unique features
Signal of quality level to satisfied customers
Means of endowing products with unique associations
Source of competitive advantage
Source of financial returns

Table 3. Role that brands play for firms (Keller 2008, 7)

Basically, an identification objective which is required to simplify product handling or tracing process is able to be served by brands because they are of assistance to organize inventory and accounting records. Also, legal protection of certain features or aspects that are uniquely attributable to firms' products or services can be offered by brands because they retain intellectual property rights which give legal title to proprietors of brands. For instance, a brand name is able to be protected by registering the name as a trademark; production procedures can be protected by patents; copyrights and designs can be used as approaches to protect packaging. The possibility of enterprises to invest in the brand safely and obtain the benefits of a valuable asset can be ensured by these intellectual property rights. (Keller 2008, 9)

For a firm, the product or service can be attached with certain unparalleled associations and meanings, which distinguish it from other products or services, by a strong brand. In other words, products or services which are sold under a strong brand can cultivate consumers' brand loyalty which provides predictability and guarantee of constant demand for the firm and build barriers of entry against its potential competitors. Generally speaking, the reason why satisfied consumers will constantly choose products or services under a brand name from the same company is that this brand works in the marketplace as a signal which indicates the level of quality. In this sense, a powerful brand itself can be used to help firms achieve competitive advantage and ultimately transfer it to tangible financial assets. (Keller 2008, 9)

2.2 Sources of Brand Equity

In order to build brand equity, strong brand knowledge is considered key because the different marketing effects and outcomes which drive the brand equity are created by it. (Keller 2008, 51)

It can be seen from figure 2, there are two major components which generate brand knowledge in the consumers' minds, namely the brand awareness and brand image. Brand awareness refers to the tool, which numbers of marketing researchers have utilized to measure consumers' ability to identify and recall the brand in numbers of various scenarios, namely the strength of the brand trace in consumers' memory. Brand image refers to the brand associations that are held in consumers' memory. In other words, brand image is defined as the perceptual vision of consumers about the brand. (Keller 2008, 51)

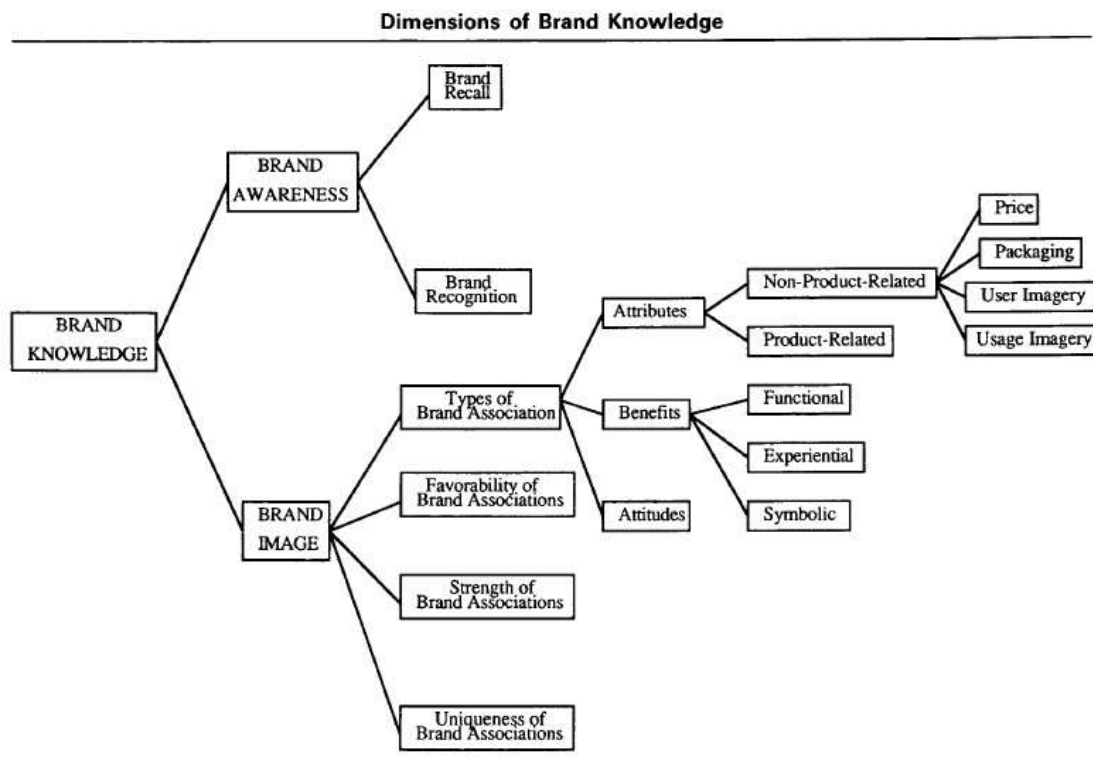


Figure 2 Dimensions of brand knowledge (Keller 1993, 7)

Professor Keller (2008, 53) points out that the brand knowledge is the key to building brand equity, and brand knowledge itself contains two components, namely brand awareness and brand image; when consumers hold a relatively high level of brand awareness and brand knowledge and bear certain strong, positive, favorable and unparalleled brand associations in their mind, is the time when brand equity occurs. In this sense, the brand awareness and brand image can also be considered as two sources of brand equity as well.

2.2.1 Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is a marketing conception and tool which has been adopted by researchers to measure the knowledge of a brand's existence in consumers' minds. Brand awareness refers to the extent to which brands correlated with specific products or services are recorded by potential and currently existing consumers mentally. (Brand awareness 2011)

Literally speaking, brand awareness is the possibility of the consumers' recognition of the availability and existence of a company's products or services in the market. (Brand awareness 2010) According to Professor Kapferer (2004, 21), brand awareness can not only be considered as a cognitive tool to measure consumers' knowledge of a brand's existence, but also a necessary step in creating brand equity, because it is correlated with a number of valuable

image dimensions. In his opinion, brand awareness is a medium which carries a believable message, which points out that brand awareness is a collective phenomenon in which when a brand is well-known, a majority of individuals knows it is well-known, although it is measured at the individual level. This phenomenon will cause spontaneous inferences in the group of consumers and consumers will be convinced by their inferences that this brand must be trustable, qualified and so on if it is well-known by numbers of people.

How brand awareness creates value and image dimensions (correlations between awareness and image)	
Good quality / price ratio	0.52
Trust	0.46
Reliable	0.44
Quality	0.43
Traditional	0.43
Best	0.40
Down to earth	0.37
Client oriented	0.37
Friendly	0.35
Accessible	0.32
Distinct	0.31
A leader	0.29
Popular	0.29
Fun	0.29
Original	0.27
Energetic	0.25
Friendly	0.25
Performing	0.22
Seductive	0.08
Innovative	0.02
Base: 9,739 persons, 507 brands	

Table 4. How brand awareness creates value and image dimensions (Kapferer 2004, 21)

It can be seen from table 4, when a consumer has a high level of brand awareness, certain image dimension will be created in his or her mind. Brand awareness is mostly linked with certain aspects such as good quality / price ratio, trust, reliability, high quality, traditional styling and so on. (Kapferer 2004, 21-22)

Professor Keller (2008, 54-55) also considers brand awareness as a necessary step in creating brand equity and one of two major sources of brand equity. However, he points out that there are two components of which the brand awareness consists and they cannot be ignored when studying brand awareness. Also he interprets brand awareness from these two aspects, namely the brand recognition and brand recall. In order to create brand awareness, it is crucial to strengthen the familiarity of the brand by repeated exposure for brand recognition, and for brand recall, certain suitable product categories or relevant consumption cues can be used to form sound association, which is correlated with them, to consumers either individual or organizational.

2.2.1.1 Brand Recognition

Brand recognition is the level to which a brand is recognized for its stated features or communications. Brand recognition, in certain cases, is also defined as a precondition of brand recall, namely the aided recall. In this situation, brand recognition is the extent to which brand names are recognized when products or services are promoted with their actual names. A broad view of brand recognition considers it to be the extent to which a brand is recognized within a specific category of a product or service for some features, and certain brand elements such as logos, slogans or colour coding can be used as tools to test the brand recognition. It is believed that the moment when a name of a product or service is able to be successfully linked with its stated logo, slogan or attributes, is the time when certain level of brand recognition is successfully presented to the public. (Brand awareness 2011)

Professor Keller (2008, 54) defines brand recognition as consumers' ability to confirm prior exposure to the brand when they are provided the brand with which as a cue to them. In other words, their ability to recognize a brand as one to which they have already been exposed when they are proceeding the consumption determines the level of the brand recognition.

2.2.1.2 Brand Recall

Consumers' ability to retrieve a specific brand from their memory when they are given a clue which consists of the product or service category, their expectations which are fulfilled by the category, or a designated scenario in which their purchasing or consumption procedure are included, is called brand recall. For instance, the brand recall of Coca Cola relies on the ability of consumers to retrieve this brand name when they take the categories of soft drink into consideration, or when they think of what they should drink when they are thirsty, whether at the store when purchasing a beverage or at home when deciding what to drink. (Keller 2008, 54)

There is a comparison which is made by Professor Keller (Keller 2008, 54), in order to indicate the differences between the performances of both brand recognition and brand recall. He assumes two different hypotheses. Firstly, he assumes that various consumer decisions are made when purchasing process being proceeded at the point of purchase, in which the brand name, logo, packaging, and other brand elements are being physically presented and being properly visible to consumers, then brand recognition is more important than brand recall. In the second scenario, if consumer decisions are mostly made in settings away from the point of purchase, then brand recall functions more effectively than brand recognition. For this reason, concerning services and certain online brands, building brand recall is more crucial than creating brand recognition because consumers must seek the brand actively and therefore they can retrieve the brand from their memory when appropriate. (Keller 2008, 54)

However, Professor Keller (2008, 54) has argued that brand recall functions less effectively than brand recognition at the point of purchase, but consumers' brand evaluations and choices will still rely on what they are able to retrieve from memory about the brand.

2.2.1.3 Advantages of Brand Awareness

For a marketer, creating a high level of brand awareness will generate three advantages, namely the learning advantages, consideration advantages, and choice advantages. In the abstract, the ultimate objective to create a high level of brand awareness is to increase the familiarity of the brand in consumers' mind through repeated exposure of certain brand elements by which enhancing the brand equity. Therefore these three advantages that a high level of brand awareness can generate are also of assistance to build brand equity as well. (Keller 2008, 54)

According to Professor Keller (2008, 54), the way the associations which can create brand image can be formed and the strength of the associations can be influenced by brand awareness. In order to create a brand image properly, the brand trace must be established in consumers' memory firstly, the learning advantages which brand awareness generates will help consumers learn and store additional brand associations and brand traces in their minds. Thus, if the brand is successfully registered in consumers' minds, creating brand equity will become easier for marketing developers. .

Consideration of advantages will help the brand awareness to be raised in consumers' minds and then increase the likelihood which makes a brand a component of the consideration set of consumers. (Keller 2008, 54) According to Professor Keller (2008, 54), no matter when consumers are purchasing products or services, they mostly will consider the brand which is

able to be acceptable or fulfilling their expectations and needs. When they are making a purchase, a consideration set will appear in their minds, in which certain brands will be listed and given serious consideration for purchase. Since most of the consumers typically consider only few brands for their purchase, increasing the likelihood makes one brand a component in the consideration set decreases the likelihood of others to be considered or recalled by consumers. In a marketing context, if one brand is located in a consumer's consideration set, its competitor will less likely be similarly located. For example, when a consumer considers McDonalds as a sound choice for a quick lunch, he or she might be less likely to consider other places such as Burger King or Kentucky Fried Chicken.

The third advantage of building a high level of brand awareness is the choice advantage. In a consumer's consideration set, choice advantage will easily affect choices among numbers of brands even if there are no other associations to those brands, especially in a low-involvement decision making process. For instance, normally, a majority of consumers obey a decision rule that in certain cases purchase only more familiar and well-known brands. But when they lack certain essential brand knowledge and necessary associations, they intend to select the most attractive one. Thus, in low-involvement decision settings, even a minimum level of brand awareness can be effective and sufficient for consumers' product choices. (Keller 2008, 55)

2.2.2 Brand Image

The definition of brand image defines it as one or a multi-dimensional impression in consumers' minds about a total individuality of a brand. (Brand image 2011) In order to create brand image positively, certain marketing channels are required to be utilized and all of them should help consumers link strong, favorable and unique brand associations with the brand in their memory. In other words, whether or not positive brand images can be created in consumers' minds depends on the existence of strong and positive brand associations in their memory. Creating positive brand associations is the key to building positive brand image. Thus, a sound brand association with its personality which contains favorability, strength, and uniqueness is the source of positive brand image. (Keller 2008, 56)

Peter Cheverton (2006, 4), who is a director of INSIGHT Marketing and People, now established as the leading international training and consultancy firm in Key and Global Account Management implementation, however, points out that a number of marketers think that if a firm is able to create a better brand image for its product or service than its competitors, a level of protection will be generated; if its better product or service bears an inferior brand image and this image will not be improved in a long term, then the brand failure for this firm is likely predictable.

But, good product or service performances and positive brand image support each other's existence. Some marketing developers concentrate more on either product or service performances or its brand image, rather than taking them both into consideration. In some cases, marketers believe that brand image is even more significant than product or service itself. Thus, a number of brands plunge into this misunderstanding, which leads to suspicions that a brand shall succeed by masking inferior products or services with better surface images. (Cheverton 2006, 4)

2.2.2.1 Strength of Brand Associations

Positive brand images which are formed by positive brand associations in consumers' minds rely on three key elements, namely the strength, favorability, and uniqueness of brand associations. The deeper a consumer considers product or service information and links it to his or her existing brand knowledge, the stronger the brand association will be. (Keller 2008, 56)

The strength of brand association is able to be affected in general by two factors, namely brand attributes and brand benefits. All those descriptive attributes which can characterize a product or service are brand attributes; the personal value and meanings attached by consumers to product or service features are brand benefits. Generally speaking, enhancing the strength of brand associations depends on discovering a way which helps consumers store the strongest brand attribute and benefit associations in their minds. For example, direct consuming experiences will form the strongest associations of brand features and benefits in consumers' minds and are relatively influential in consumers' decisions in physical product fields; word of mouth is considered to be particularly significant for consumers' association of brand attributes and benefits in service industries. (Keller 2008, 57)

2.2.2.2 Favorability of Brand Associations

Favorability is another essential elements to form a positive brand image. Selecting the favorability of brand associations which can be linked to the brand requires careful analysis both on consumers and the competition. Through convincing consumers that the brand possesses certain features and benefits which satisfy their needs and fulfill their expectations, favorable brand associations can be created. Thus, favorable brand associations refers to certain desirable associations, which are delivered by products or services successfully, conveyed by supportive marketing channels properly, and linked to the brand by consumers spontaneously including convenience, reliability, effectiveness, efficiency, and colorfulness. (Keller 2008, 57)

2.2.2.3 Uniqueness of Brand Associations

According to Professor Keller (2008, 58-59), strong brand associations will be essential to the success of a brand. But, all the brands have competitors that launch either direct or indirect competition against each other. Thus, a brand will most likely share certain brand associations with other brands. In certain cases, a firm can adopt shared associations to define the extent of competition for its own brand with others and establish a category membership including other brands. But mostly, even if there is no direct competition which a brand should face in its product category, and thus a brand does not share product-related features with other brands, still there will be indirect competition for a brand and the brand will share more abstract associations with other brands in a more widely defined product category. This requires proprietors of brands to create not only strong but also unique brand associations which are not able to be shared with competing brands. In short, when consumers make a purchase, unique and favorable associations will help them choose the brand from all other brands in the same product or service category.

2.3 Choosing Brand Elements to Strengthen Brand Awareness

Brand elements, also known as brand identities sometimes, are those elements that serve to distinguish and identify the brand. Brand elements include all the necessary external manifestations of brands including brand names, URLs, logos, symbols, characters, spokespeople, slogans, jingles, packages, and signage. In order to enhance brand awareness, facilitate the process of forming strong, favorable and unique brand associations or generate sound brand judgments and feelings before consumers, appropriate brand elements can be selected and utilized by marketing developers as effective tools and by which ultimately to creating brand equity. (Keller 2008, 140)

As stated before, brand awareness consists of two components, namely brand recognition and brand recall. When consumers have no additional associations and enough brand knowledge about a brand, its brand elements which are exposed before consumers will be the first impression in consumers' mind. If the brand elements are selected carefully and exposed properly to consumers, a high level of brand recognition will be established in consumers' minds and thus will be able to help consumers store a strong brand node or trace in their memory for its brand recall. By doing so, its brand awareness can be successfully enhanced. (Aaker 2002, 10)

2.3.1 Concept of Brand Elements

According to David Aaker (2002, 68), who is a consultant and author in the field of marketing, particularly in the area of brand strategy, and currently is being the vice chairman of Prophet,

a global brand and marketing consultancy firm, Professor Emeritus at the Haas School of Business of the University of California, Berkeley campus, brand elements refer to a unique set of brand associations which serve to provide direction, purpose, meaning for a brand, identify the brand in marketplace, as well as represent what the brand stands for and indicate a promise to consumers either individual or organizational. Brand elements can help brands' proprietors establish a relationship between brands and consumers by playing a role as a value proposition which delivers functional, emotional or self-expressive benefits to consumers.

Alina Wheeler (2009, 4), who works as a brand consultant, author and designer especially in branding fields, points out that brand elements are those tangible identities to the senses of brands. Brand elements allow consumers to see them touch them, hold them, hear them, and feel them. One of the most significant functions of brand elements is that brand elements can help to elevate brand recognition, amplify the uniqueness of a brand as driving forces, deliver the intangible identities such as emotion, contexts or essence to consumers as medias, and make the potential meaning and value inside the brand more accessible to customers as value propositions. Brand elements are those disparate identities unified in a whole system.

2.3.2 Criteria for Choosing Brand Elements

In order to enhance brand awareness, facilitate the process of forming strong, favorable and unique brand associations or generate sound brand judgments and feelings before consumers, brand elements are able to be utilized by marketing developers as effective tools and ultimately to create brand equity. For marketers, in order to ensure brand elements can function as driving forces of brand recognition and propositions of brands' intangible value, there are six main criteria which can be adopted not only for marketers to choose appropriate brand elements but also as tools to measure brand elements' performances. Six criteria for brand elements are the memorability of brand elements, meaningfulness of brand elements, likability of brand elements, transferability of brand elements, adaptability of brand elements, and protectability of brand elements. (Keller 2008, 140)

It can be seen from table 5 which includes all six criteria for brand elements with more specific sub choices for each. Technically, the memorability, meaningfulness, and likability, namely the first three standards, are considered to be the offensive strategy for marketers to build brand equity. The latter three, namely the transferability, adaptability, and protectability are marketers' defensive strategy to leverage and maintain brand equity in case there are different chances and constraints. (Keller 2008, 140-141)

Criteria for Choosing Brand Elements

1. Memorable

<p>Easily recognized</p> <p>Easily recalled</p>
<p>2. Meaningful</p> <p>Descriptive</p> <p>Persuasive</p>
<p>3. Likable</p> <p>Fun and interesting</p> <p>Rich visual and verbal imagery</p> <p>Aesthetically pleasing</p>
<p>4. Transferable</p> <p>Within and across product categories</p> <p>Across geographic boundaries and cultures</p>
<p>5. Adaptable</p> <p>Flexible</p> <p>Updatable</p>
<p>6. Protectable</p> <p>Legally</p> <p>Competitively</p>

Table 5. Criteria for choosing brand elements (Keller 2008, 141)

2.3.2.1 Memorability

As mentioned before, successfully creating brand equity requires a high level of brand awareness, which consists of two components, namely brand recognition and brand recall. (Keller 1993, 7) Thus if brand elements are inherently memorable and attention-getting, it is believed that consumers' recall or recognition process in purchase or consumption settings can be facilitated and then promote the objective to achieve a high level of brand awareness. (Keller 2008, 140)

The set of brand elements of Lufthansa German Airline will be adopted as an example, in order to demonstrate how the memorability of brand elements functions in consumers' minds.



Figure 3 Logo of Lufthansa German Airline (www.goodlogo.com 2011)

It can be seen from figure 5 that this set of brand elements including the brand mark, or sometimes called graphical logo of Lufthansa, namely the flying crane circled by a blue outlined golden sun, and the characters, also called corporate typeface, which is set in a relatively modern font, Helvitica. In this case, a brand of a commercial airline which adopts a flying crane with a golden sun will help consumers link it immediately with the brand's product or service category; the blue and yellow colour coding helps consumers distinguish it from other competitors who often use one colour with white, such as the red with white of Swissair and blue with white of Finnair. In Lufthansa's choices of colours, blue represents thoroughness and respectability, and also delivers the traditional brand association of the sky. Yellow helps Lufthansa to be easily differentiated from other competitors and it is felt to represent, among other things, speed, security, vitality, and technology. Such a set of brand elements of a commercial airline which is contrasting coloured and featured by a flying crane is likely to be stored and easily recalled in consumers' memory. (Rathgeb 2006, 62)

2.3.2.2 Meaningfulness

Alina Wheeler (2009, 34) points out that the majority of best chosen brand elements have common ground among them. This common ground means they all stand for something, such as a unique innovation, a strategic position, a defined set of values and so on. By frequent use of meaningful brand elements appropriately when consumers understand what they stand for, they will be more powerful, thus helping to facilitate the formation of brand equity. Meaningful brand elements can be considered as the most efficient and effective form of communication known to people, and meaningful brand elements are rarely immediate and they evolve over time.

There are three attributes about the meaningfulness of brand elements. Firstly, meaningfulness of brand elements can drive consumers' creativity. Marketers will use brand elements to attach certain meanings into brand with unique visual forms and expressions, and sometimes understanding these meanings can help consumers form a more widely-covered brand association with other product or service categories. Secondly, meaningfulness of brand elements can build consensus among consumers about brands. Once consumers' consensus about one brand is established, a critical synergy, which can influence consumers' attitude

about the brand, will be generated. Thirdly, the meaningfulness of brand elements will evolve as companies grow. (Wheeler 2009, 35)

In Professor Keller's opinion (2008, 141), brand elements will deliver almost all the meanings to consumers, with either descriptive or persuasive content. To measure the extent of meaningfulness, marketers should rely on two significant criteria which indicate that if the general information about the nature of the product category is covered within brand elements, and if the specific information about particular features and benefits of the brand is properly delivered to consumers.

2.3.2.3 Likability

Independent of the memorability and meaningfulness of brand elements, the likability of brand elements refers to the level of how attractive visually aesthetically, and verbally the brand elements are to consumers. Compared with certain poorly-designed brand elements, a relatively memorable, meaningful, and likable combination of brand elements will provide a number of advantages because normally consumers will not examine much information during their product decision making process. (Keller 2008, 142)

As Professor Keller states (2008, 142), a brand's culture, missions, strategies, and values are usually not easily accessible to consumers. Sometimes consumers create their brand associations only by seeing a brand's public face, or its expressions projected by multiple identity elements with numbers of aesthetic styles and themes. Consumers never examine these all at once but they will integrate various perceptions into their overall impressions, thus, the likability of brand elements can be used as an approach to affect consumers' impressions and then create a high level of brand awareness ultimately.

2.3.2.4 Transferability

First of all, the transferability of brand elements can help proprietors of brands to measure the extent to which brand elements add to the brand equity of new products or services for the brand. In other words, the more useful the brand elements for products or services category extensions, the more transferable those brand elements will be. For instance, "Amazon" denotes a massive South American river and it can be adopted for a large number of various types of products or services if it is used as a brand, whereas the "Suomalainen Kirjakauppa" (Finnish bookstore) will not be able to afford the same flexibility apparently. Secondly, the transferability of brand elements can indicate the extent to which brand elements add to the brand equity across geographic or cultural borders and market segmentations. In this sense, it depends on the cultural content and linguistic qualities of brand elements. For example, a

simple and clear brand slogan like Nokia's "Connecting People", can be easily translated into other languages and introduced to a different cultural dimension, compared to certain brand elements, such as Pepsi's slogan "Pepsi Brings you Back to Life", which means "Pepsi Brings the dead back from the grave" in Chinese. Thus before introducing a brand into a new market with different linguistic environment and cultural background, companies need to review the transferability of all their brand elements. (Keller 2008, 143, 146)

2.3.2.5 Adaptability

When designing and choosing brand elements, marketers need to take the adaptability of brand elements over time also into consideration. Because consumers' values and opinions will change as time goes by, and the brand elements themselves need to remain contemporary and require to be updated. The more adaptable and flexible the brand elements are, the easier the updating process will be. For example, in order to make the public face of a brand look more modern and relevant, its brand elements can be given a new look or redesigned by professionals. (Keller 2008, 143).

2.3.2.6 Protectability

The protectability is the final general consideration of six criteria for choosing brand elements. It is used to measure how protectable a brand's brand elements are, both in a legal and a competitive sense. As stated above, brands can retain intellectual property rights which give legal title to proprietors of brands. Thus marketers are required to choose brand elements which are able to be protected legally and internationally, to register them with suitable legal bodies formally, and defend trademarkable identity elements from unauthorized competitive infringement; in a competitive sense, thus requires marketers to ensure the brand elements are protectable competitively. In order to maintain the uniqueness of a brand, marketers need to avoid those names, packages, and other brand elements which are able to be copied easily, because, in a sense, those brand elements will build potential competitors to the leading brand in the market. (Keller 2008, 143-144)

2.3.3 Options and Tactics for Brand Elements

According to Professor Keller (2008, 145), using one single brand element is difficult to satisfy all six criteria for brand elements, namely the memorability, meaningfulness, likability, transferability, adaptability and protectability. For example, an ideal brand name, which is considered to be the most central of all brand elements, should be easy to recall, properly suggestive, rich in meaningfulness, easy to pronounce, timeless, neither too simple nor too complicated, and easy to be protected both legally and competitively. For marketers, it is

almost impossible to design a brand name like this. Besides, the more meaningful the brand name is in one specific linguistic environment and cultural dimension, the harder to transfer or translate it to another culture, thus, it is preferable to adopt numbers of various options and tactics to design and choose brand elements.

2.3.3.1 Brand Names

Professor Keller (2008, 145) points out that a brand name is the most central element of all relevant brand elements, and sometimes it can help consumers capture the central theme or key associations of a product or service in a compact and economical fashion.

Alina Wheeler (2009, 20) also states that a sound brand name captures the imagination and can connect it with the targeted group the firm would like to reach. She describes a sound brand name in her mind as “The right name is timeless, tireless, easy to say and remember; it stands for something, and facilitates brand extensions. It sounds has rhythm. It looks great in the text of an email and in the logo. A well-chosen name is an essential brand asset”.

An effective brand name owns seven qualities, namely the meaningful quality, distinctive quality, future-oriented quality, modular quality, protectable quality, positive quality, and visual quality. The meaningful quality of a brand name supports the brand image which the firm would like to convey because a brand name communicates the essence of the brand with consumers. The distinctive quality is also called unique quality. It can help to distinguish the brand name from other competitors’. Future-oriented quality of brand names will position the firm for its growth, changes, and success; it owns sustainability and preserves possibilities. The modular quality of a brand name enables firms to create their brand extensions easily. The protectable quality, or protectability of a brand name, provides a brand name with a feature that is it can be formally registered and trademarked legally, by which the firm has the domain of the brand name. The positive quality helps a brand name avoid strong negative connotations. The visual quality of brand names means a good graphic presentation in a logo or in contexts when the brand name is being presented in a form of texts. (Wheeler 2009, 21)

However, Professor Keller (2008, 146) has argued that it is quite hard for marketing developers to design a satisfactory brand name for a new product or service. Even though there are nearly 140,000 words in the English vocabulary, An American recognizes only 20,000 of them in general, and only 7,000 words of the 20,000 words can be utilized to form a effective brand name. Thus, Alina Wheeler (2009, 21) summarizes seven types of formation which can be used to create a brand name. These seven name types are the founder type, the descriptive type, the fabricated type, the metaphor type, the acronym type, the magic type and a all-in-one combined type. A founder type name refers to a brand name named after the firm’s founders,

such as fashion brand Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger, Chanel, and so on. The advantage of a founder type brand name is that it can be easier to protect legally, and its disadvantage is that this type founder name ties it to a real human being inextricably. The descriptive type name conveys the nature of the business, such as Facebook, or E*TRADE. It can communicate the intent of the company clearly with consumers, but when the firm's business grows or diversifies, the disadvantage will emerge which is the limitation of future extensions. Fabricated type brand names refer to those made-up brand names such as Kone, Kodak, Xerox or Sony. They might be, in general, distinctive and easy to copyright, but making the fabricated type brand name well-known requires a large amount of capital in marketing communications. The metaphor type brand name is a popular choice to marketers. Certain metaphor type brand names like Nike and Patagonia are interesting to visualize and often can tell a story. Acronym type brand names refer to brand names which are formed in abbreviations, such as IBM, GE, CNN, NBC, BBC, DKNY and so on. These names are distinctive enough in certain cases, but in general, to consumers, they will be difficult to remember and also difficult to copyright. Certain marketers alter the spelling of words to create a brand name with uniqueness. If a word's spelling can be changed appropriately, like Cingular or Netflix, this word can be a unique and protectable brand name; if not, the word will be a negative media of brand elements. In order to create the best brand names, some marketers will use an all-in-one strategy to create the brand name, such as Citibank, Hope's Cookies, and Cingular Wireless etc. These names have their protectable quality, distinctive quality, meaningful quality, and consumers prefer distinctive and understandable brand names.

2.3.3.2 URLs

URLs is the abbreviation of uniform resource locators. URLs usually refer to domain names which are used to specify locations of webpage on the World Wide Web. In recent years, because of the development of Internet and the online marketing activities, the number of registered URLs are increasing dramatically. If a firm's URL can be used appropriately, it will become one of the effective brand elements of the brand. Firstly, a formally registered URL can protect firms' brands from unauthorized use in other domain names. Secondly, for an existing brand, the main URL is able to be used as a straightforward and literal translation of the brand name. However, using the URL as a brand element is necessary but not critical, especially for certain firms who do not intend to implement internet branding activity. (Keller 2008, 154-155)

2.3.3.3 Logos and Symbols

Visual elements, like logos and symbols, play a significant role in creating brand equity and especially building brand awareness, even though the brand name is considered as the key element of a brand. In history, the logo was used as an approach to indicated origin and

ownership. For instance, numbers of families and countries have utilized logos as visual presentations to visually represent their names for centuries. Nowadays, logos are not only used to indicate ownership, origin, but also hint associations and create uniqueness and recognition of brands. A logo ranges from a corporate name written in an unique form to a completely abstract illustration which might be unrelated to the corporate name or corporate activities. Certain non-word mark logos are also named symbols. A well-designed logo or symbol offers certain advantages to brands. For example, some logos are versatile in different cultural dimensions, because they communicate with consumers in a nonverbal way. These logos can transfer well across cultures and over a range of product or service categories. In certain cases, when the full brand name is impossible to be presented or used, the logo of this brand can be a replacement. Comparing to brand names, it is easier for marketers to update logos over time to create a contemporary look. (Keller 2008, 156)

According to Mac Cato (2010, 72), who is an American branding expert and one of the original founders of Cato Johnson, which is a strategic marketing company, a brand logo is a sign, which can be utilized in many ways, of brand recognition. In his opinion, a logo or a symbol of a brand plays three roles as a brand element. Firstly, it functions as a visible reminder to activate the brand recall which exists only in the consumers' memory. Secondly, it evokes brand association in consumers' minds. Thirdly, a brand logo is able to be linked to both commercial products or services and social persuasion causes.

Alina Wheeler (2009, 51) points out that there are mainly five types of brand logo. Those types of logo include the wordmark type logo, letterform type logo, emblem type logo, pictorial type logo, and abstract type logo. The wordmark type logo refers to those logos which are designed in the form of a freestanding acronym, company name, or product name, such as IKEA, Google, and Nokia. Letterform type logos usually are presented in a unique design which uses one or more letterforms that act like a memorable identity for a company name, like IBM, HP, GE, UPS etc. A brand logo in which the company name is tightly linked to a pictorial will be defined as a emblem type logo, such as TiVo, OXO and so on. A highly recognizable, simplified and stylized literal image can form a pictorial type logo, like the logo of Apple, Polo, Lacoste, Twitter etc. Abstract type logos refer to those brand marks which are unrelated to the brands' product or service categories but convey an idea or manifest a company's strategic ambiguity, like Nike, HSBC, Herman Miller and so on.

2.3.3.4 Characters

A brand character can be defined as a special type of brand symbol which is usually represented by human or real-life characteristics. Brand characters can play a important role especially in advertising campaigns and package designs, and they are typically introduced through

advertisements. There are two major types of brand characters, namely the fictitious or animated characters, such as the Japanese animated figure Hello Kitty, Pillsbury's Jolly Green Giant etc, and live-action figures like Ronald McDonald, Colombian coffee's Juan Valdez and so on. (Keller 2008, 158)

Using brand characters as a option of brand elements is able to help the brand itself communicate the key product or service benefits to consumers because most of the brand characters are active, colourful and rich in imagery, this tends to be attention getting and helpful for building brand awareness. Brand characters can also be adopted as a tool to enhance the likability of the brand and help to create the brand's perceptions as fun and interesting. For consumers, brand characters help them form a relationship with the brand easily and certain popular brand characters can even become valuable licensing properties and provide additional brand exposure to consumers. (Keller 2008, 159)

According to Alina Wheeler (2009, 64), a well-designed and positioned brand character is able to successfully embody the brand values and brand features. It tends to be most central to advertising campaigns. Certain best brand characters will be widely accepted by consumers who cherish them and then become even cultural icons. With their unique appearance and individuality, many brand characters own recognizable voices and jingles, enabling them to become more alive and adorable to consumers.

2.3.3.5 Slogans

According to Professor Keller (2008, 159), a brand slogan, also known as a brand tagline, is a short phrase which communicates descriptive and persuasive information about the brand to consumers. Brand slogans are powerful brand elements because they can help consumers understand the meaning of the brand in a form of certain imperative, descriptive, superlative, provocative, or specific phrases. In other words, they can be considered an indispensable means of summarizing and interpreting the intent of marketing programs in a few short words or phrases.

Alina Wheeler (2009, 24) also points out that the brand slogan can influence consumers' consumption behaviour by evoking their emotional responses. A good brand slogan intends to capture the essence, personality and positioning of a brand, and also helps to distinguish the brand from other competitors. When designing a brand slogan, marketers should attach the slogan with ten essential attributes. The best slogan should be short and simple enough; it should help the brand be differentiated from competitors; it should be unique; it should successfully and properly capture the brand essence and brand positioning; it should be easy to say and recall for consumers; it should not deliver negative connotations to consumers; it

should be displayed in a small font; it should be easy to be protected legally and trademarked formally; it should evoke emotional responses from consumers; and it should be difficult to create in case competitors trying to copy the concept.

2.3.3.6 Jingles

Jingles refer to those musical messages which are usually written or composed by professional music composers for the brand. Jingles have been adopted as significant brand devices since the beginning of the first half of the twentieth century when broadcast advertising was confined primarily to radio. Jingles can be considered as extended musical brand slogans because, unlike other brand elements, they usually convey brand meaning in a nondirect and relatively abstract fashion. Thus, what jingles create for the brand are those potential brand associations which are most likely to associate to feelings and personality, and other intangibles. As a brand element, a brand jingle is most valuable in elevating brand awareness because it often repeat the brand name in an amusing fashion which allows consumers to rehearse or repeat the jingle mentally after the advertisement is over, and it provides more encoding opportunities and can strengthen the memorability of the brand in consumers' minds. A well-composed and popular brand jingle serves is able to serve as an advertising foundation for years, and even become an effective clue which activates consumers' brand recall. (Keller 2008, 164-165) For instance, Finnish cellphone manufacturer Nokia adopted an excerpt of "Gran Vals", which is a composition for solo guitar, written by a Spanish classical guitarist and composer Francisco Tárrega in 1902, as its cellphone's default ringtone in 1993 and it has been very popular since then. Nokia registered this tune as a trademark and protected brand jingle in 1999-2000, and nowadays, this Nokia tune rings almost in every single Nokia's TV commercial. (Nokia tune 2011)

2.4 Using the Internet as an Effective Tool to Enhance Brand Equity

As mentioned above, enhancing the brand equity requires to improve two sources of it, namely the brand awareness and brand image; In order to strengthen brand awareness and brand image, the participation of certain marketing channels is required. For instance, utilizing certain marketing programs to implement repeated exposure of brand elements can help consumers build a high level of brand recognition and brand recall, which are considered two components that form brand awareness; building a positive brand image requires marketing programs which link strong, favorable, and unique associations to the brand in consumers' minds. (Keller 2008, 55-56)

According to Lindström and Andersen (2000, 3), there is a current trend for more and more competing products and services to resemble each other in the marketplace, and the lifecycle

of those products and services is becoming shorter every day. In order to achieve more competitive advantage, a large amount of capital is invested in the development and maintenance of brands by companies. Currently, a number of firms are still trying to create a high level of brand awareness and positive brand image via image campaigns in print, on television and through other relatively traditional classical media. However, it requires huge investment and becomes more difficult to make the appropriate brand knowledge across properly. It requires huge investment because creating a high level of brand awareness needs the brand to be represented in more places and to reach more consumers; it becomes more difficult because more and more disciplines need to be mastered by marketers than before to create an appropriate brand image. This explains why more and more marketers would like to take certain digital media into consideration and as the public starts embracing the medium of the Internet. (Lindström & Andersen 2000, 3)

2.4.1 The Concept of Internet

The Internet is a global system of interconnected computer networks which can serve large numbers of users worldwide. (Internet 2011)

The origins of the Internet date back to the 1960s when certain computers were connected in the United States of America to form the ARPAnet which was intended to enable academics and military personnel to implement the exchange of defense information in such a way that it could still function even though individual parts broke down. The growth of use of the Internet has occurred since the development of the World Wide Web (WWW). This World Wide Web concept was originated by a British scientist called Tim Berners-Lee in 1989, and finally became a commercial proposition in 1993. (Lindström & Andersen 2000, 20)

The World Wide Web can be considered as an interlinked publishing platform in which graphic and text information can be displayed. The graphic and text information is stored on web server computers and users are accessible to those information using web browser programs, which display the graphic and text information and allow users to choose web links to access web sites. The World Wide Web turns the Internet from a hard-to-use tool for academics and scientists into a user-friendly tool for discovering information for business and consumers. (Chaffey, Mayer, Johnston & Ellis-Chadwick 2003, 19)

2.4.2 Advantages of the Internet as a Global Medium

A large number of connected computers are enabled by the Internet to communicate with each other. The information exchange flow is allowed to be transmitted from client personal computers whose users request services from server computers which hold information and

certain host applications which deliver the services in response to requests. By the end of 2000, there were over 450 million users of the Internet worldwide and that makes the Internet a large-scale global medium. (Chaffy et al. 2003, 20)

In a sense, compared with those traditional classical media, such as print materials, televisions and so on, the Internet functions more effectively. Because it has two major advantages those relatively traditional classical media do not possess. Firstly, the Internet is a global concept and system, it break through the limitation of those local media and reaches more targeted consumers. Secondly, Internet is a large-scale compatible digital platform in which not only can those graphic and text information be displayed, but which also contains other digital media which function in the same way as traditional classical media, such as digital television, online newspaper, online satellite mobile phone and so on. These advantages help the Internet create new forms and models for information exchange, marketing activities and brand building. (Chaffy et al. 2003, 27)

2.4.3 Defining the Most Suitable Products and Services for the Internet

According to Lindström and Andersen (2000, 58), all products and services are suitable for Internet branding in principle. However, certain products and service categories are more suitable than others, because they are suited to the features of the Internet itself.

For marketers, it is critical to ensure that their product and service category are suited to those features before adopting the Internet as a marketing and branding tool for their brands. Compared to traditional media, there are four attributes possessed by the Internet, namely interactivity, intelligence, individualisation, and integration. (Chaffey et al. 2003, 27-31)

The interactivity of Internet can be exemplified in certain aspects. For instance, in the Internet environment, consumers can initiate contacts; consumers are allowed to seek information as they wish; the Internet allows marketers to achieve 100% of the individual's attention when a consumer is viewing a web site; the Internet allows firms to gather and store the responses of individuals; consumers' needs can be addressed and taken into consideration in future dialogues. (Chaffey et al. 2003, 27-28) Figure 6 shows two different communication models between the Internet and traditional media.

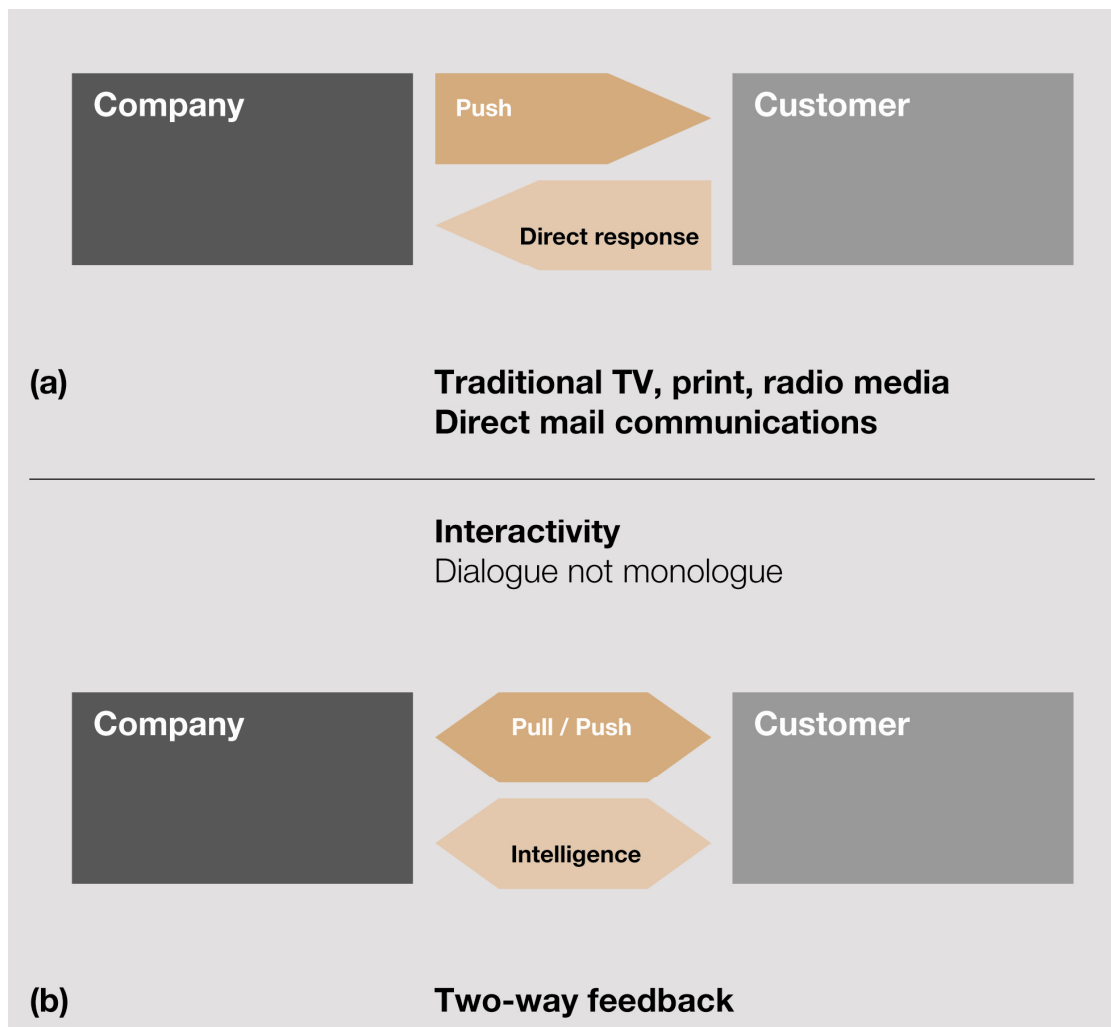


Figure 4 Summary of communication models for: (a) traditional media, (b) new media (Chaffey et al. 2003, 28)

It can be seen from figure 4 that during the brand knowledge delivering process in model a, there is limited interaction with customers, although interaction is encouraged in the form of direct response or mail-order campaign. Those traditional media are acting predominantly as push media to deliver the brand knowledge from companies to consumers. The communication model b can be used to demonstrate how the Internet should be used to encourage two-way communications. On the Internet, consumers usually initiate contact and seek information which helps them build their brand knowledge on a web site subjectively. In other words, The Internet creates a pull mechanism in communication model b unless E-mail is used, because E-mail is defined also as one of the push techniques. (Chaffey et al. 2003, 28)

The Internet can also be used as a relatively low-cost intelligence collecting method for marketers during their process to strengthen brand awareness and brand image. Because in certain cases, those marketing intelligence refers to the information particularly about consumers' perceptions and expectations of the brand. (Chaffey et al. 2003, 29)

Another feature of the Internet is that it allows itself to be tailored to the individual unlike the traditional media in which the same message about the brand is addressed to everyone. Individualisation of the Internet is a significant aspect to achieve customer relationship management online, it also helps to form a user-oriented image for the brand online. For instance, American personal computer hardware manufacturer Dell has set up “Premier Pages” for certain customers in which special offers and certain custom-made customer support are delivered. (Chaffey et al. 2003, 29)

The most important feature of the Internet is its integration. For example, the Internet can be used as tool which enables customers to respond to offers and certain promotions which are publicized in other media; the web site on the Internet can have a direct response facility into it; the Internet can be used to support consumers’ purchasing decisions even if the purchase does not occur through the web site and support customer service. By playing multiple roles in one compatible platform, the Internet can be considered as an effective tool which can help to facilitate the process of creating a high level of brand awareness, form positive brand association, building good relationship with consumers, and ultimately to enhance the brand equity both in the real world and on the Internet. (Chaffey et al. 2003, 29-32)

2.4.4 Value of Branding Online

According to De Chernatony and McDonald (2003, 299), the emergence of the Internet induced a golden age for brands, because numerous opportunities are brought to brands. Fundamentally, there are three major values of online branding. Firstly, the Internet can help to build genuine relationships between brands and consumers. Secondly, the Internet provides consumers of the brand with better tailored offerings. Thirdly, The Internet has greater interactivity.

The value of relationship building refers to the feature of the Internet, which means those brands which prosper on the Internet environment do so not by trying to influence consumers’ purchasing behaviour by telling consumers, but by listening and learning about consumers. Many organizations attempt to build relationships with consumers via their online brands and one way of doing this is to provide consumers with expressly designed and crafted pages which fulfill consumers’ differential expectations and needs. For instance, an individual consumer will be interested in the product or service category of this brand while potential investors are focusing on its financial data. Sound relationships between the brand and consumers can also be built by seeking consumers’ online feedback, and by using the Internet to listen to comments and feedback about the brand, brand marketers can better understand how to build a better relationship with consumers. (De Chernatony & McDonald 2003, 299-300)

Providing consumers with better tailored offerings through the Internet means that the Internet can offer the ability to consumers to co-create the value of the brand based on their expectations, and the ability to better tailor a brand is not just restricted to physical goods. For example, in order to create a positive, warm, and consumer-oriented brand image online, Virgin Credit Card enables consumers to select the look of their credit cards, to decide how they wish to balance their interest rate against reward points and so on. (De Chernatony & McDonald 2003, 300)

According to De Chernatony and McDonald (2003, 301-302), the Internet can help to create values around the brand for those consumers who do not envisage themselves in the passive mode which characterizes their involvement with TV commercials, but envisage being given alternatives, making decisions by their interactions with the brand. For instance, a consumer can visit a place where automobiles are being sold and begin to appreciate the variety of types and colours he or she can choose to buy. The idea can be reinforced by press advertisements or being advised by other people who have necessary brand knowledge. However, consumers will always doubt which type and colour of the car will be the best. German automobile manufacturer Volkswagen has developed certain functions on its web site to facilitate the decision making process. Consumers are able to check and edit various types of automobiles in different colours and different environments as they wish, and finally select the best one in their minds.

2.5 Other Marketing Communication Options to Strengthen Brand Awareness and Brand Image Online

In order to properly build strong brand equity, the primary objective for marketers is to strengthen two sources of the brand equity, namely the brand awareness and brand image. Marketers may not be able to achieve this goal by only adopting one marketing communication program. In certain cases, marketers should employ multiple communications and coordinate those media to achieve the goal. Because different communication options can support each other and may target different market segments. For example, the Internet marketing or advertisements on TVs may bring numbers of new consumers into the market or attract competitors' customers to the brand, whereas promotions and event marketing are able to be employed to reward those existing loyal consumers of the brand. (Keller 2008, 234)

2.5.1 Advertising

According to Professor Keller (2008, 235), any paid form of non personal presentation and promotion of ideas, consuming goods, or services by an identified sponsor can be defined as advertising. It also can be considered a powerful approach to build strong, favorable, and

unique brand associations and induce positive brand feelings in consumers' minds. Comprehensive studies demonstrate the power of advertising campaign. For instance, an analysis of the effects of the advertising campaign on sales, which utilized the data from Nielsen's single-source database of 142 packaged-goods brands from 1991 to 1992, indicated that nearly 70 percent of the advertising campaigns in the sample boosted sales immediately, and 46 percent of the advertising campaigns added a positive effect to a long-term sales boost.

Advertising campaigns are able to be implemented by different advertising media or approaches, including the TV, radio, print media, Internet, and place advertising. (Keller 2008, 236-252)

From a brand equity perspective, television can be considered a powerful media to implement advertising campaign because of certain features it possesses. Firstly, it allows graphic contents, text contents, sound, and motion to be displayed within it and reaches a wide spectrum of consumers in specific territories. Thus makes it an effective tool to vividly demonstrate product or service features and persuasively interpret their benefits and values for consumers. Secondly, TV advertising plays a compelling role of representing user and usage imagery, brand personality, and so on. (Keller 2008, 236)

There are two advantages to adopting the radio as one of the media alternatives of advertising campaigns. Firstly, radio is highly characterized by its flexibility. For instance, the radio audiences are highly targeted, advertisements are relatively inexpensive to produce and place, and its short closings allow for quick responses from the audience. Secondly, radio can be considered a pervasive and effective media for advertising campaign. The research indicates that 96 percent of all Americans 12 years and older listen to the radio daily, and on average, over 20 hours a week; it can also be used to effectively reinforce TV advertisements and enable firms to obtain a balance between broad and localized market coverage. (Keller 2008, 244)

Print media mainly refer to newspapers and magazines. They are particularly effective media for advertising campaigns to build user and usage imagery and provide more detailed product or service information compared to broadcast media. They are also as pervasive as the broadcast media. For example, a study shows that daily newspapers are read by over half of the population and tend to be utilized a lot for local advertising. (Keller 2008, 245-246)

According to Professor Keller (2008, 248-249), with the development of the Internet, marketers tend to create a presence in virtual cyberspace. More and more advertising campaign have been implemented online. There are also two advantages to online advertising. Firstly, online advertising is a relatively low cost advertising approach, and it can offer consumers a high level of detail and degree of customization. Based on the interactive feature which is offered by the

Internet itself, consumers are allowed to choose the brand information relevant to their needs or expectations. Secondly, because certain software are able to trace which advertisement went to which sales, this makes online advertising accountable. It is also nondisruptive, which means it does not interrupt consumers. Most important is that online advertising reaches consumers globally rather than locally, it is able to target consumers so that only the most promising prospects are contacted, consumers can discover information as they desire.

Place advertising, often known as out-of-home advertising, is the last category of advertising campaign. It is also a broadly defined advertising category which captures advertising outside traditional media. Because traditional advertising media, especially television advertising, are becoming less effective, increasingly, advertisements and commercials are implemented in unusual places. For marketers, it is a option or tactic to reach consumers in other environments, such as places where consumers work, play, and shop. Some of the alternatives are available for marketers to implement the place advertising campaign, including billboards, movies, airlines, lounges, product placement, posters and point-of-purchase. (Keller 2008, 252)

2.5.2 Promotion

Professor Keller (2008, 256) defines sales promotions as “short-term incentives to encourage trial or usage of a product or service”. Compared to advertising, the major difference between them is that advertising offers consumers a reason to purchase, but sales promotions offer provide consumers an incentive to purchase. Sales promotions are designed to achieve two primary objectives. First, sales promotion should change the behaviour of the trade so that they carry the brand and support it properly. Second, sales promotion should change consumers’ behaviour so that they buy a brand for the first time, buy more of the brand, or buy the brand more often. There are certain advantages to sales promotions both from a pricing perspective and brand equity perspective. Firstly, consumer sales promotions allow firms to charge different prices to groups of consumers who hesitate in their price sensitivity. Secondly, a carefully arranged sales promotion can create brand equity via information or product and service experience which is able to help to create strong, favorable, and unique brand associations.

2.5.3 Event Marketing and Sponsorship

Event marketing refers to public sponsorship of certain events or activities relevant to sports issues, art, entertainment, or social causes. Event sponsorship offers a different communicating alternative for marketers. Even sponsorship allows sponsors, who are usually proprietors of brands, to build close relationships with their target markets by becoming part of a special and personally relevant moment in consumers’ lives. (Keller 2008, 261)

Professor Keller (2008, 261-262) summarizes certain potential advantages to sponsor events from branding perspectives. For example, event marketing and sponsorship allow marketers to link their brands to those events which are popular with a specific or broad group of consumers, and thus helps marketers to identify with a particular target market or lifestyle. Event marketing and sponsorship also can help to increase the awareness both of the brand and the company, because sponsorship often provides sustained exposure to the brand which can be considered a critical condition to forming a high level of brand recognition. The most significant advantage of event sponsorships is that events themselves possess certain special associations which can help to create or reinforce brand associations.

2.5.4 Public Relations and Publicity

From a branding perspective, public relations and publicity relate to numbers of programs and are expressly designed to promote or protect a brand or a firm's public image or its individual products and services which are sold under the brand name. The publicity refers to certain non personal communications such as press releases, media interviews, press conferences, feature articles, and so on. Public relations can also include annual reports, fund-raising, special event management and so on. As a marketing communication option, public relations may be invaluable for strengthening brand awareness and brand image during a marketing crisis, but it needs to be a routine part of a firm's marketing communication programs, because in certain cases, it is quite useful for creating consumer word of mouth which can be used to elevate the public face of the brand. (Keller 2008, 264-265)

2.6 Summary of the Theoretical Discussion

Based on the theoretical discussion in this paper, readers should be able to learn that a relatively strong and sustainable brand depends on its strong brand equity. One way to build strong brand equity relies on its two major sources, namely a high level of brand awareness, and a strong, favourable brand image in consumers' minds. A relatively high level of brand awareness can be achieved by utilizing multiple marketing communication tools to deliver the brand knowledge and brand personality which can be carried by certain well designed brand elements, including logos, symbols, jingles, characters etc to potential consumers; a strong, and favourable brand image is able to be created through positive brand associations. During the brand equity building process, the Internet can be considered as an effective tool, a global medium to enhance the performance of the two sources of brand equity by reaching more targeted population easily and offering an more interactive communication environment to consumers; certain marketing communication options can also be adopted as supportive marketing device, such as advertising, promotion, event marketing, public relations and

publicity etc, to enhance the performance of brand awareness, create positive brand image, and ultimately build brand equity on the Internet.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

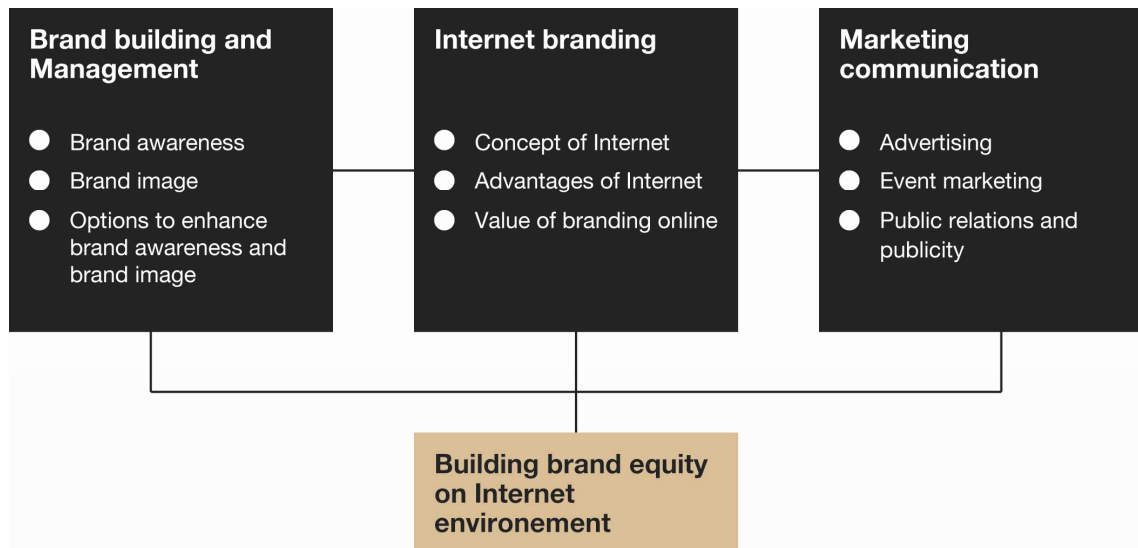


Figure 5 Theoretical framework of the thesis

Figure 5 shows all the variables and the whole theorized networks between them and the key research question. The value and advantages of utilizing the Internet as an effective device to enhance brand equity is placed in the middle, between the chapter of brand building and management in which include the discussion of two main sources of a strong brand equity that can be enhanced within online environment, and the chapter of marketing communication which refers to certain marketing communication options that can be utilized also on Internet environment to enhance the brand awareness and brand image. The combination of three different chapters serves one objective, namely offering the answer to the research question which refers to how to build strong brand equity online.

3. Research Approach

Research can be defined as a diligent search, study-relevant inquiry, analysis, investigation or experimentation which are designed and implemented for discovering new facts and findings. This definition of research can even be expanded to refer to any subject of inquiry with reference to collecting information, interpreting certain facts, and reviewing existing scientific theories with new facts or evidence. In general, research is conducted to enhance researchers' knowledge of what they already know; to extend researchers' knowledge with regard to those aspects of certain specific studying fields of which they hardly know or do not know at all, and

to enable researchers to better understand the world. (Adams, Khan, Raeside & White 2007, 19-20)

Fundamentally, there are three types of research study which can be conducted to achieve different knowledge outcomes, namely the descriptive research, explanatory research, and the predictive research. (Adams et al. 2007, 20)

Descriptive research is basically aimed at describing phenomena and not concerned with understanding why behaviour is the way it is. When researchers set out a template to describe how they think the world is, conducting descriptive research will be quite useful. The descriptive research can also be considered as the starting point of exploratory research. In other words, a research project with regard to little-known phenomena starts with a descriptive research. For instance, adopting descriptive research can help researchers to describe social systems and relationships between events, and provide necessary background intelligence as well as stimulating explanations. (Adams et al. 2007, 20)

Explanatory research is mainly adopted to describe phenomena and to help researchers explain why behaviour is the way it is. In the scientific sense, explanatory research is theoretically deeper than descriptive research. Conducting explanatory research enables researchers to better understand the nature of what they are studying. Fundamentally, explanatory research can be used to, for instance, explain social relations or events, advance the structural knowledge, process and the nature of social events, link elements of issues into general statements and create, test, or review a scientific theory. (Adams et al. 2007, 20)

Among these three types of research study, in a scientific sense, predictive research is usually considered the most difficult and problematic one in practice. Because predictive research is an attempt not only to explain behaviour but also to predict future behaviour with the explanatory variables related to a particular phenomenon. This type of research study is usually adopted by governments before designing and applying certain relevant policies. (Adams et al. 2007, 20)

3.1 Research Method

In order to obtain relatively valid and reliable answers to research questions, researchers are required to decide what research method they should apply when processing numerous data and problems. Technically speaking, there are mainly two domains of research methods which are frequently observed in the literature, and these include the qualitative research method and quantitative research method. Researchers are able to apply one single method or a combination of them to serve the objectives of their study best. (Adams et al. 2007, 26)

Qualitative research requires the application of methodological approaches which are based on various theoretical principles including the phenomenology, hermeneutics and social interactionism. It aims to employ methods of data collection and analysis which are non-quantitative, as well as helping to process the exploration of social relations, and describing realities based on respondents' experiences. Qualitative research methods have been adopted in the field of social sciences for a long time. (Adams et al. 2007, 26)

Quantitative research methods refer to the type of research which is based on the methodological principles of positivism and neo-positivism, and adhere to the criteria of a strict research design which is conducted prior to the actual research. Researchers usually adopt quantitative research methods for quantitative measurement and hence statistical analysis. In other words, quantitative research can also be called statistical research, when handling quantitative data and questions which are related to numbers and percentages, quantitative research methods will usually be adopted. It can be used to describe numerical data-related phenomena and it requires a numerically large and representative sample. (Adams et al. 2007, 26)

3.2 Validity and Reliability

There are certain criteria which can be utilized to evaluate and test the measurements of research variables, ensure the quality of data, and research design methods, and elevate the overall accuracy of the research results. The most important two of them are validity and reliability. They are quite significant in both qualitative and quantitative research. (Adams et al. 2007, 235)

In practice, validity can be considered as the strength of researchers' conclusions, inferences or propositions. It refers to the degree or level to which researchers measure what they intend to. In other words, the validity of a research study can be simply defined as the accuracy of researchers' measurement. Compared to the reliability of a research study, it is believed that validity is more significant because if an instrument does not measure the way it should, then the accuracy of the result is unacceptable even if the result is obtained through consistent measurements. (Adams et al. 2007, 237)

Adam, Khan, Raeside and White (2007, 235) define the reliability of a research study as a quality that "estimates the consistency of the measurement or more simply, the degree to which an instrument measures the same way each time it is used under the same conditions with the same subjects". More precisely, reliability is all about consistency. For instance, if researchers measure something many times and the final result is always the same, then it is

believed that the measurement instrument of researchers is reliable.

3.3 The Research Approach in This Thesis

As the research in this thesis primarily aims at examining the online brand awareness and brand image of the case project for students, a large number of users will be chosen as samples for collecting the primary data. With regard to the numerically large group of users, the quantitative method will be used in the research of this thesis. More detailed descriptions will be presented below.

3.3.1 The Research Process

For the author, to obtain valid results and ensure the research will be undertaken properly and successfully, a series of steps is followed while designing the whole research process.

Step 1. Finding a research topic & clarifying the research problem

Step 2. Critically reviewing the literature

Step 3. Designing research approach

Step 4. Selecting samples for the data collection

Step 5. Using questionnaires to collect primary data

Step 6. Analyzing quantitative data

Step 7. Obtaining the final results & presenting the findings

Figure 6. Research process for students at the final year of study (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2003, xii)

It can be seen from figure 6, in this thesis, the author follows these seven essential steps. The author starts the research with finding an appropriate research topic and clarifying the key question to the research. In order to fully understand the nature and relevant aspects of the research, a relevant, well-structured and supportive theoretical framework is critical, thus requires the author to fully undertake the second step which is to review the relevant literature. In the third and fourth step, the feature of the research topic requires the author to adopt quantitative research method in this thesis, and the research field decides that the author chooses numbers of students as the targeted research samples. After the sample selection process, a questionnaire is distributed to the targeted research group for collecting primary data, then follows the analysis of the quantitative data by adopting the SPSS program as the analyzing tool in Microsoft Windows system. The last step in the research process for the author is to obtain the final results and present certain findings by which the author will be enabled to offer future suggestions for further relevant research.

3.3.2 Methodology in the Study

This research was carefully planned and designed from the beginning. As the questionnaire in this case is adopted as a means to conduct the research, each question in it was carefully considered and is related to the research problem. The designing process of the questionnaire commenced on 17 February 2011.

The targeted group of this research includes approximately 200 students in three academies out of all 700 users at twelve partner academies in Finland. The questionnaires were distributed to the target samples in order to collect their objective feedback and opinions concerning the current brand awareness and brand image of the case project, namely Massidea.org, then the results will be carefully analyzed with SPSS program in the Microsoft Windows opening system. Based on the results, the author will be allowed to adopt relevant brand building knowledge to help the case project team improve and strengthen the brand awareness and brand image. The conclusions and recommendations based on the result of the research results will be offered to the case project team as the reference of their brand building strategy in the future.

Due to practical reasons, which are the large number and the relatively wide geographic pattern of the targeted group, namely nearly 700 users at twelve different universities in Finland, this research was actually not conducted as it should have been in principle, It was too

difficult for the author to distribute research questionnaires to all users at all different places. But it was conducted with three partner universities and certain lecturers that were willing to participate and willing to help distribute research questionnaires in their currently running courses. Thus, the author randomly selected 200 users from these three partner academies as the targeted samples of the research. The selection of the research samples did not cover all the active users and the research results cannot be considered to be geographically wide-covered but they are able to partially meet the demands of the validity and the reliability of the research, which means that similar results can be obtained through repeated research with the same research methods and the tight relationship between the research question and the research results is able to be reflected through repeated literature review. In this sense, the results of this research can be considered interesting and useful.

3.3.3 The Research Questionnaire

The questionnaire of the empirical research is based on the theoretical background. In addition to that, the structure and objective of this research was also taken into consideration when the research questionnaire being designed. Considering the objective of this research, namely examining the actual performances of the case project's brand awareness and brand image to students, as well as the possibility of building brand equity online, the research questionnaire is divided into three parts.

With regard to each part of the research questionnaire, part one is to discover how possible it is for the case project to build brand equity within the Internet environment by asking respondents "1. Do you consider that Internet as one of the most important tools for your daily working tasks and studies?" and "2. How often do you use Internet?" These two questions are designed to examine the level of acceptance on the Internet and the frequency of use of the Internet among students. Part two is designed to examine the level of current brand awareness and the performance of the brand image in students' minds. Respondents will be asked about five questions. The first question is "About massidea.org" and four alternatives are offered to respondents including "A. I have never heard of it before this survey", "B. I have heard of it at school but I have no idea what it is all about", "C. I have experience in trying it", and "D. It is a familiar brand to me". By analyzing the different percentages selecting each alternative, the current level of brand awareness can be examined. The next three questions are designed to examine the performances of different brand elements, which are essential for achieving a high level of brand awareness. These three questions are "How do you find the brand name 'Massidea.org'?" "How do you find the slogan 'Smashing Ideas' of Massidea.org?" and "How do you find the brand logo of Massidea.org?" Certain alternatives, which are based on Professor Keller's six criteria for choosing brand elements, namely the memorability, meaningfulness, likability, transferability, adaptability, and protectability (Keller 2008, 140-143) are offered to

respondents. By analyzing the different percentage of choosing each alternative, the author is able to discover the relationship between the current level of brand awareness and the performances of different brand elements. The last two questions in part two are about examining the current brand image and discovering users' expectations about this brand. Respondents will be asked "How do you find the current brand image of Massidea.org?" and "In general, what should a social media platform be like?" Part three consist of four questions including "1. Age", "2. Respondent's position", "3. Gender" and "4. Respondent's study or working place". This part is expressly designed for the final research statistics. Considering the target group of this research is students at universities, the first two questions in this part are not variables which can affect the research results, they will not be analyzed for research statistics. But for the case project team, these data still possess the reference value.

200 copies of this research questionnaire were distributed at three different universities of applied sciences which resulted in 143 sample return.

4. The empirical research

The empirical research in this thesis has been conducted for the case project Massidea.org, which is an online social media platform. The objective of this research is to examine the actual performances of the case project's brand awareness and brand image in students' minds, as well as the possibility and approaches to build brand equity online.

4.1 Analysis of the Results

The research results were analyzed with the SPSS for Windows program. Research findings, which are presented in the form of tables and charts will be presented part by part as the structure of the research questionnaire. In addition to the research findings, correlation between certain results will be also discussed.

4.1.1 Part 1. Respondents' Attitude to the Internet

Part one is to discover how possible, for the case project, to build brand equity within Internet environment by asking respondents "1. Do you consider the Internet as one of the most important tools for your daily working tasks and studies? " and " 2. How often do you use the Internet? " These two questions are designed to examine the level of acceptance of the Internet and the frequency of use of the Internet among students.

4.1.1.1 Question 1. Do you consider the Internet as one of the most important tools for your daily working tasks and studies?

This question mainly examines the level of acceptance of the Internet in the student group. In other words, this question examines the extent to which students accept the Internet as a significant tool for their daily lives, or the likability of the Internet among students. Two alternatives, namely “A. Yes” and “B. No” are offered to respondents, by analyzing the different percentage of choosing alternatives, a valid result can be achieved.

Do you consider the Internet as one of the most important tools for your daily working tasks and studies?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	143	100,0	100,0	100,0

Table 6. The level of acceptance on Internet: Do you consider the Internet as one of the most important tools for your daily working tasks and studies?

Table 6 shows that 100 percent of respondents, namely all 143 respondents consider that the Internet is one of the most important tools for their daily lives. The result indicates that in the student group, a high level of acceptance of the Internet exists.

4.1.1.2 Question 2. How often do you use the Internet.

This question mainly examines the frequency of use of the Internet among students. With regard to this question, five different alternatives are offered to respondents, namely “A. Once a day”, “B. Several times a day”, “C. Once a week”, “D. Several times a week” and “E. I do not use the Internet at all”. Among these five alternatives, “day” is considered as a fundamental unit to distinguish frequent frequency of utilization and infrequent frequency of utilization of the Internet. If the majority of respondents use the Internet several times in one day, it is believed that Internet shares a relatively high frequency of utilization in this target group.

How often do you use the Internet?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Once a day	5	3,5	3,5	3,5
Several times a day	138	96,5	96,5	100,0
Total	143	100,0	100,0	

Table 7. The frequency of utilization of Internet: How often do you use the Internet?

It can be seen from table 7, among all 143 respondents, 96.5 percent of them, namely 138 respondents use the Internet several times a day, and 3.5 percent, namely 5 respondents use the Internet at least once a day. This results hints that among students, the Internet owns a relatively high level of the frequency of utilization.

4.1.2 Part 2. Brand Awareness and Brand Image of Massidea.org in Student Group

Part two is designed to examine the level of current brand awareness and the performance of the brand image in students' minds. Respondents will be asked about five questions. The first question is about massidea.org and four alternatives are offered to respondents including "A. I have never heard of it before this survey", "B. I have heard of it at school but I have no idea what it is all about", "C. I have experience of trying it", and "D. It is a familiar brand to me". By analyzing the different percentage of selecting each alternative, the current level of brand awareness can be examined. The next three questions are designed to examine the performances of different brand elements, which are essential for achieving a high level of brand awareness. These three questions are "How do you find the brand name 'Massidea.org'?" "How do you find the slogan 'Smashing Ideas' of Massidea.org?" and "How do you find the brand logo of Massidea.org?" Certain alternatives, which are based on Professor Keller's six criteria for choosing brand elements, namely the memorability, meaningfulness, likability, transferability, adaptability, and protectability (Keller 2008, 140-143) are offered to respondents.

4.1.2.1 Question 1. About Massidea.org

This first question is about massidea.org and four alternatives are offered to respondents including "A. I have never heard of it before this survey", "B. I have heard of it at school but I have no idea what it is all about", "C. I have experience in trying it", and "D. It is a familiar brand to me". By analyzing the different percentage of selecting each alternative, the current level of brand awareness can be examined.

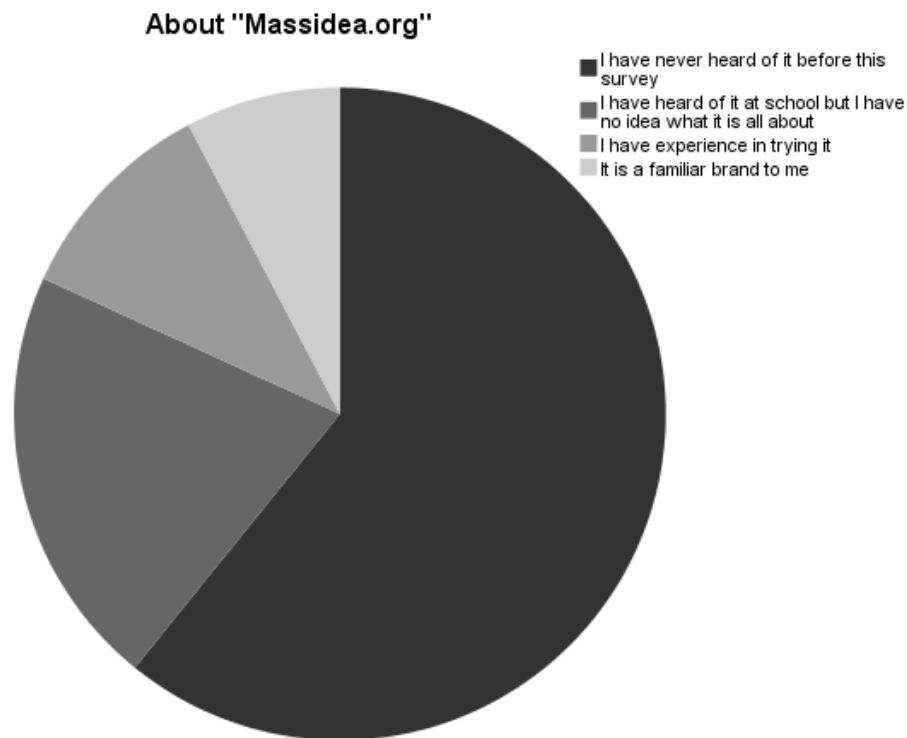


Figure 7. Examination of brand awareness in student group: About "Massidea.org"

Figure 8 shows the level of current brand awareness of the case project. It can be seen from this pie chart that almost 60 percent of respondents have never heard of the brand before this research; 21 percent of respondents have noticed the existence of the brand but the brand knowledge has not been properly delivered to them the appropriate brand association has not been established in their minds. 11 percent of respondents have experience of trying it, and only 8 percent of respondents consider Massidea.org as a familiar brand to them. Based on the result, it is believed that Massidea.org possesses a relatively low level of brand awareness in the student group.

4.1.2.2 Question 2. How do you find the brand name "Massidea.org" ?

This question mainly examines the performance of the brand name, which is considered as one of most important brand elements to create a high level of brand awareness. Six alternatives are offered to respondents, for each alternative, respondents are requested to choose an option according to a scale from 1 to 5, in which 1 means "Totally disagree", 2 means "Slightly disagree", 3 means "Neither agree nor disagree", 4 means "Slightly agree" and 5 means "Totally agree". Respondents are requested to circle the number from the scale which in the respondent's opinion best responds to the alternative. These six alternatives are "It is

complicated”, “It is simple”, “It is easy to recall”, “It is easy to pronounce”, “It is elegant” and “It is meaningful”. All six alternatives examine three major criteria from Professor Keller’s six criteria for choosing brand elements, namely the memorability, likability and meaningfulness of the brand name.

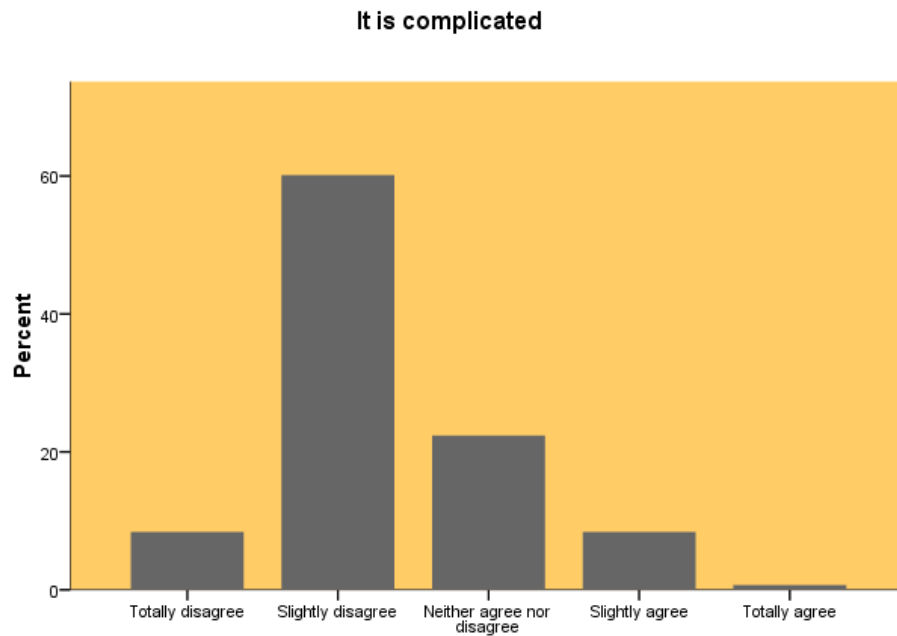


Figure 8. The performance of the brand name: It is complicated

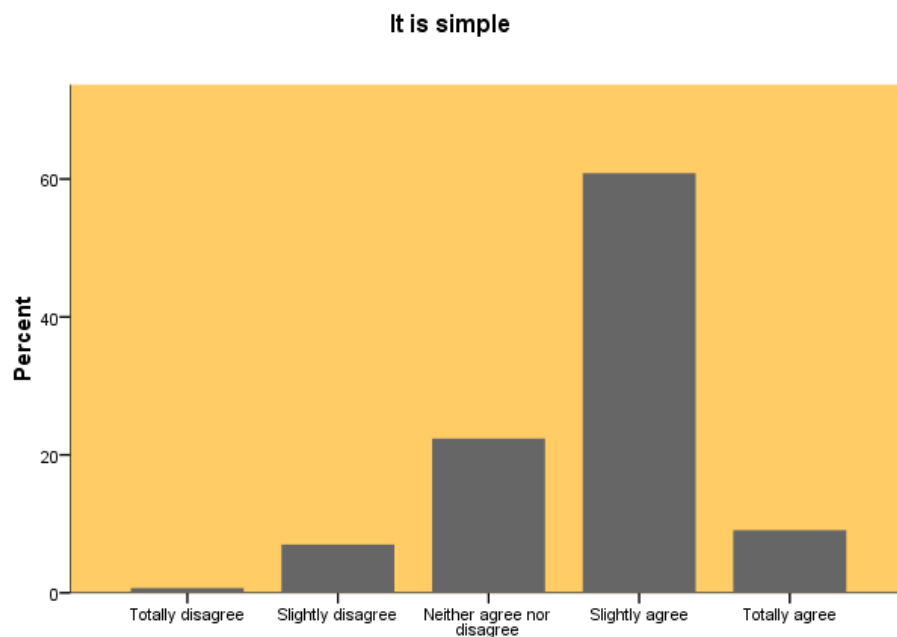


Figure 9. The performance of the brand name: It is simple

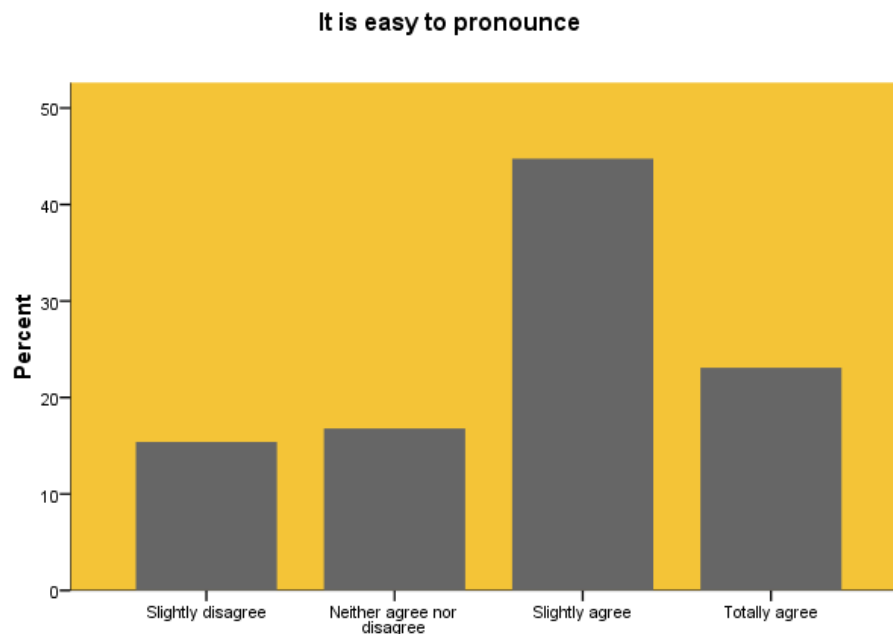


Figure 10. The performance of the brand name: It is easy to pronounce

Figures 8, 9 and 10 indicate different results of the examination on the simplicity and pronunciation of the brand name. It can be seen from figure 8 and 9 that almost 60 percent of all respondents agree the brand name possesses a high level of simplicity. Figure 10 shows that more than 60 percent of respondents agree that it is easy for them to pronounce the brand name correctly.

According to Professor Keller (2008, 147), simplicity, ease of pronunciation and spelling can obviously improve brand awareness and enhance the memorability of the brand element itself. Based on the results above, it is believed that the brand name “Massidea.org” has a relatively high level of memorability.

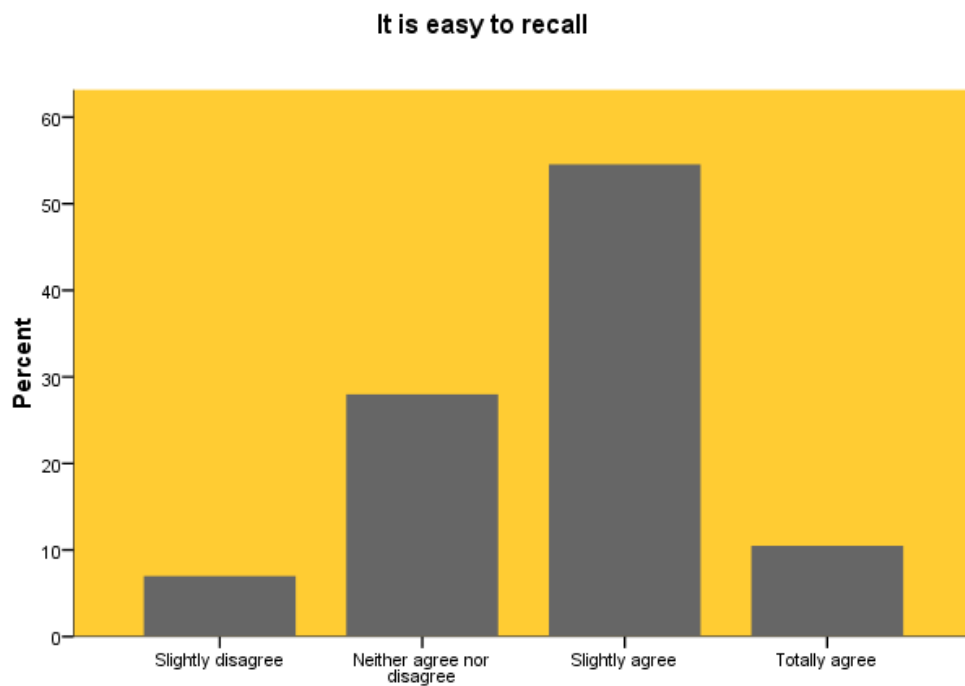


Figure 11. The performance of the brand name: It is easy to recall

Figure 11 proves the validity of Professor Keller's opinion, a simple, easy to pronounce, and spell brand name owns a high level of memorability. More than 60 percent of respondents agree that the brand name is easy for them to recall.

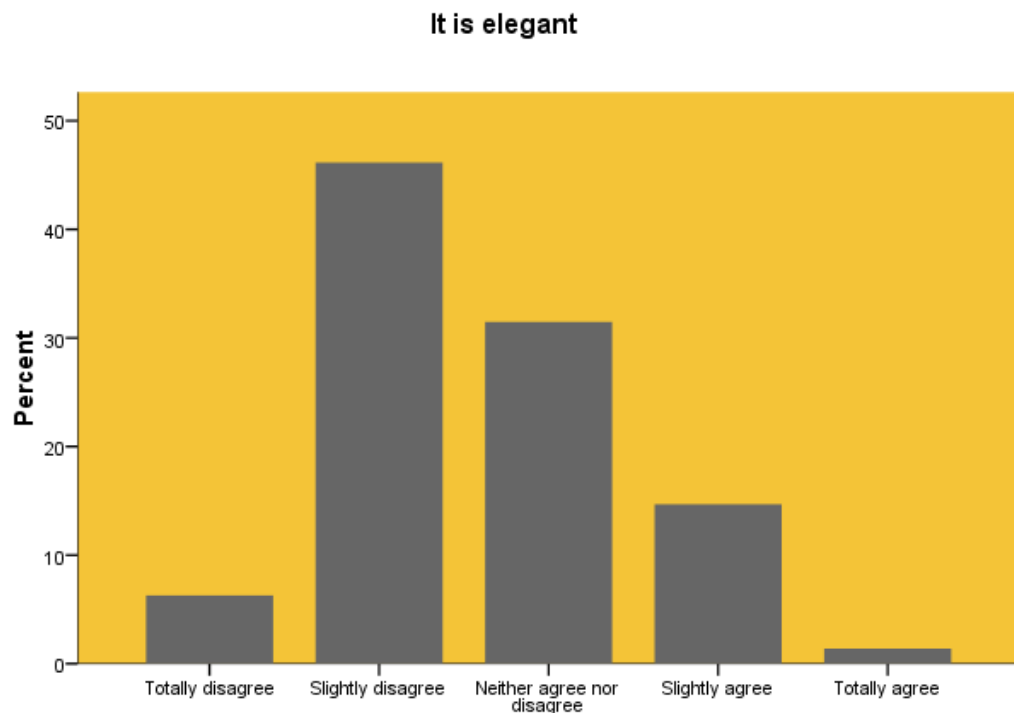


Figure 12. The performance of the brand name: It is elegant

Even though figure 11 shows a high level of memorability of the brand name, Figure 12 indicates a relatively negative symptom with regard to the likability of the brand name. It can be seen from figure 12, the investigation of the elegance of the brand name indicates more than 50 percent of respondents agree that this brand name is not that elegant, only less than 20 percent respondents think that this brand name is elegant. If a brand name appears inelegant to the public, this may jeopardize the likability of the brand name itself.

With regard to the meaningfulness of the brand name, figure 13 shows that 56 percent of respondents slightly agree that Massidea.org is a meaningful brand name, and 19 percent of respondents totally agree with it. In other words, almost 75 percent of respondents consider Massidea.org as a meaningful brand name. Based on this research result, it is believed that the brand name “Massidea.org” has achieved a relatively high level of meaningfulness.

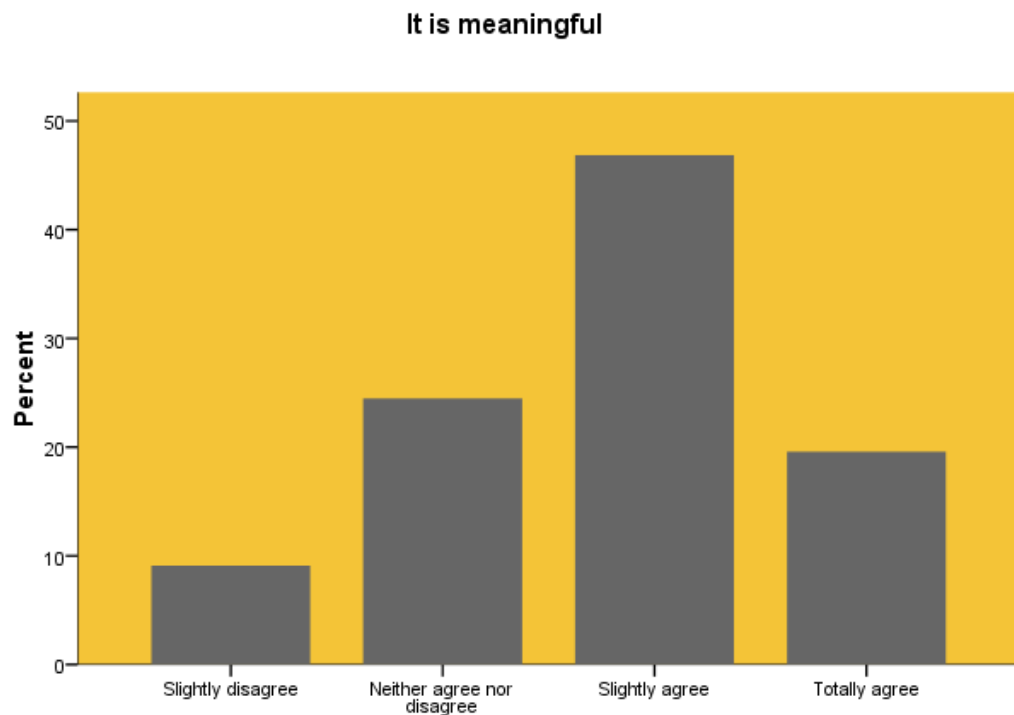


Figure 13. The performance of the brand name: It is meaningful

4.1.2.3 Question 3. How do you find the slogan “Smashing ideas” of Massidea.org?

This question mainly examine the performance of the brand slogan. Four alternatives are offered to respondents, for each alternative, respondents are requested to choose an option according to a scale from 1 to 5, in which 1 means “Totally disagree”, 2 means “Slightly disagree”, 3 means “Neither agree nor disagree”, 4 means “Slightly agree” and 5 means “Totally agree”. Respondents are requested to circle the number on the scale which in the respondent’s opinion best responds to the alternative. These four alternatives are “It is simple”, “It is meaningful”, “It is confusing”, and “It is easy to recall”. All four alternatives are to examine two major criteria from Professor Keller’s six criteria for choosing brand elements, namely the memorability and meaningfulness of the brand slogan.

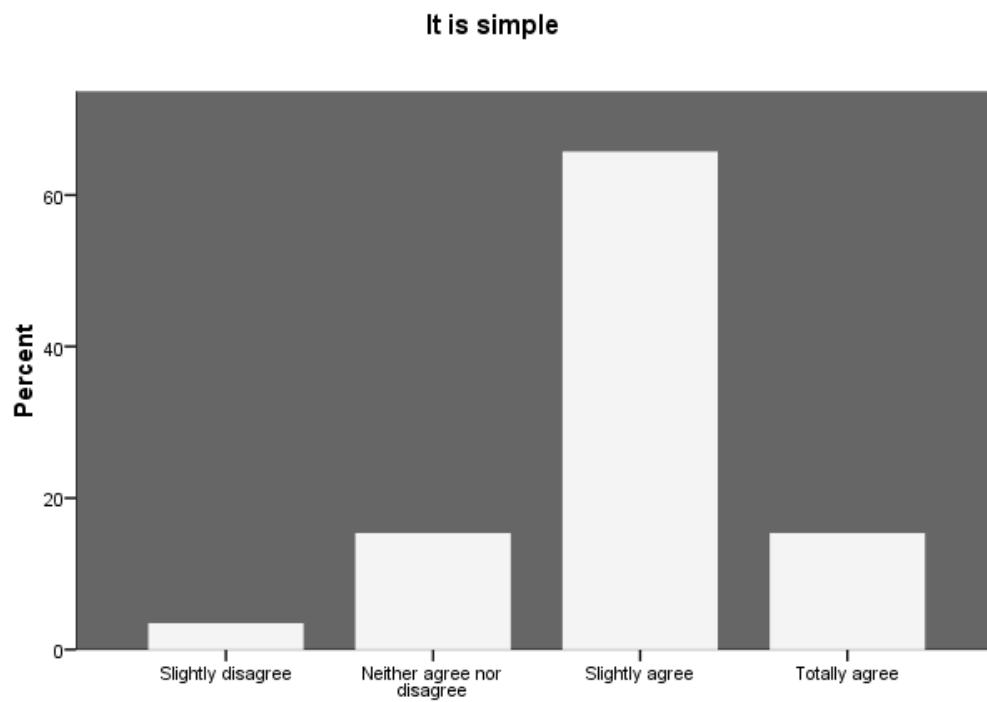


Figure 14. The performance of the brand slogan: It is simple

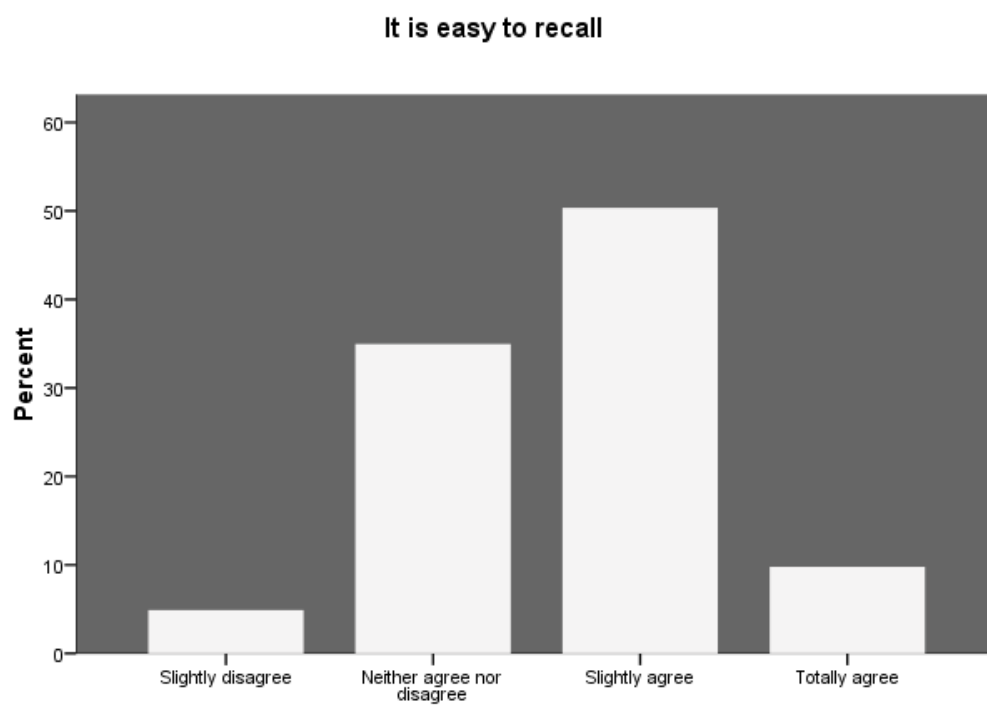


Figure 15. The performance of the brand slogan: It is easy to recall

Professor Keller (2008, 159) points out that a simple, meaningful brand slogan can be considered a powerful branding device to build brand equity. Figure 14 shows the results of the investigation into the simplicity of the brand slogan. It can be seen from the bar chart that 60 percent of respondents slightly agree that the brand slogan of Massidea.org is simple, 18 percent of them totally agree with that. In other words, 78 percent of respondents agree that the brand slogan of Massidea.org is simple.

As mentioned above, simplicity of the brand element enhances the memorability. It can be seen from figure 15, more than 60 percent of respondents agree that the brand slogan of Massidea.org is easy to recall, thus indicating that the brand slogan possesses a relatively high level of memorability.

It is meaningful

	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Totally disagree	,7	,7	,7
Slightly disagree	7,7	7,7	8,4
Neither agree nor disagree	40,6	40,6	49,0
Slightly agree	40,6	40,6	89,5
Totally agree	10,5	10,5	100,0
Total	100,0	100,0	

Table 8. The performance of the brand slogan: It is meaningful

With regard to the meaningfulness of the brand slogan, table 8 indicates that 40.6 percent of respondents slightly agree that the current brand slogan is meaningful, and 10.5 percent of respondents totally agree with it. In general, more than 51 percent of respondents agree that the current brand slogan of Massidea.org is meaningful.

It is confusing

	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Totally disagree	7,0	7,0	7,0
Slightly disagree	48,3	48,3	55,2
Neither agree nor disagree	35,0	35,0	90,2
Slightly agree	7,7	7,7	97,9
Totally agree	2,1	2,1	100,0

It is confusing

	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Totally disagree	7,0	7,0	7,0
Slightly disagree	48,3	48,3	55,2
Neither agree nor disagree	35,0	35,0	90,2
Slightly agree	7,7	7,7	97,9
Totally agree	2,1	2,1	100,0
Total	100,0	100,0	

Table 9. The performance of the brand slogan: It is confusing

Table 9 verifies the validity of the results which are presented in table 8 in a contrary manner. It can be seen from table 9 that 48.3 percent of respondents slightly disagree that the brand slogan is confusing, and 7 percent of respondents totally disagree with this statement, in other words, more than 55 percent of respondents disagree that the brand slogan is confusing.

Based on the research results concerning the brand slogan, it is believed that the brand slogan itself has achieved a relatively high level of meaningfulness. But, there is still a special symptom which deserves to be noticed in table 8. When circling the right numbers in the scale from 1 to 5, it can be seen that the amount of respondents who selected “Slightly agree” equals the amount of respondents who selected “Neither agree nor disagree”, both account for 40.6 percent. In this case, one possible explanation is that for those 40.6 percents of respondents who selected “Slightly agree”, the current brand slogan “Smashing ideas” means something to them, and the meaning of the brand slogan is strongly linked to the product and service category. For the 40.6 percent of respondents who selected “Neither agree nor disagree”, one possibility is that they really have no idea what this alternative stands for, another one is that this brand slogan also means something to them, but not the meaning matches their expectations.

4.1.2.4 Question 4. How do you find the brand logo of Massidea.org?

This question mainly examine the performance of the brand logo. Five alternatives are offered to respondents, for each alternative, respondents are requested to choose an option according to a scale from 1 to 5, in which 1 means “Totally disagree”, 2 means “Slightly disagree”, 3 means “Neither agree nor disagree”, 4 means “Slightly agree” and 5 means “Totally agree”. Respondents are requested to circle the number from the scale which in the respondent’s opinion best responds to the alternative. These five alternatives are “It is simple”, “It is elegant”, “It is easy to recognize”, “It is meaningful”, and “It is easy to recall”. All six

alternatives examine three major criteria from Professor Keller's six criteria for choosing brand elements, namely the memorability, likability and meaningfulness of the brand logo.

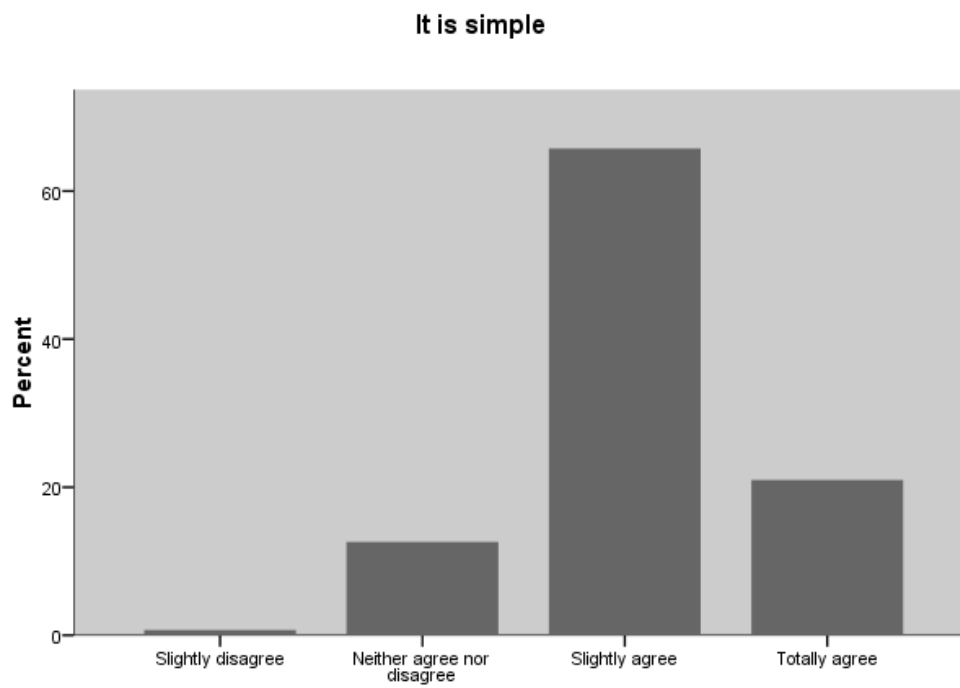


Figure 16. The performance of the brand logo: It is simple

Figure 16 shows the research results concerning the simplicity of the brand logo. It can be seen from figure 16 that more than 80 percent of respondents agree that this brand logo owns a high level of simplicity.

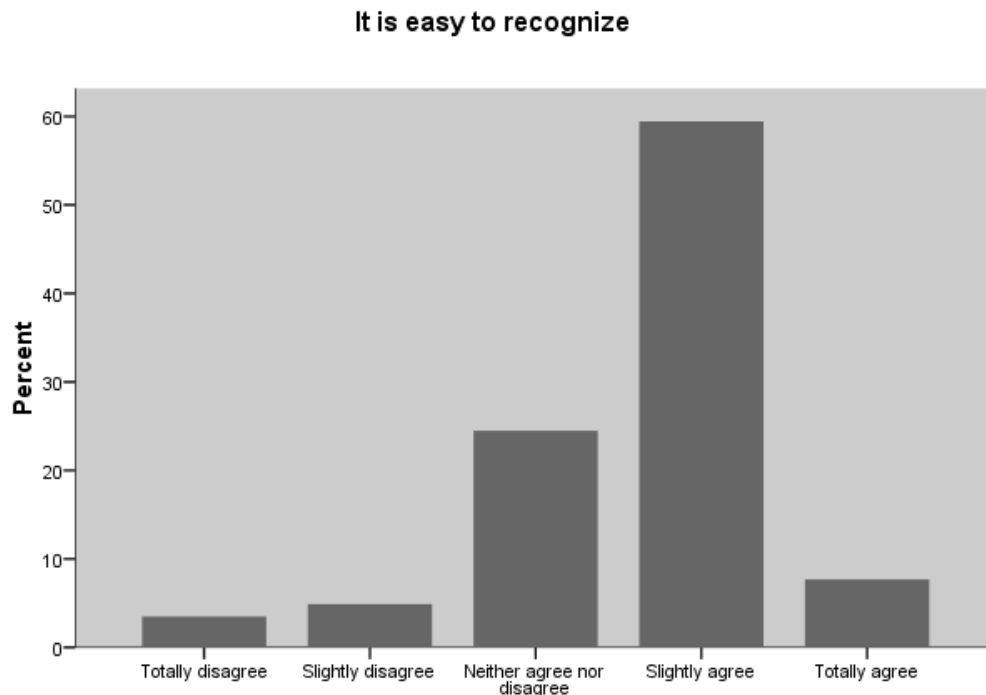


Figure 17. The performance of the brand logo: It is easy to recognize

Figure 17 indicates that 59 percent of respondents slightly agree that the brand logo of Massidea.org is easy for them to recognize, 6 percent of respondents totally agree. In general, approximately 65 percent of respondents agree that the brand logo of Massidea.org is easy to recognize.



Figure 18. The brand logo of Massidea.org

According to Professor Keller (2008, 156), an abstract logo can be quite distinctive and recognizable. It can be seen from Figure 18 that the case project uses a relatively abstract logo, thus, the majority of respondents consider it an easily recognizable logo.

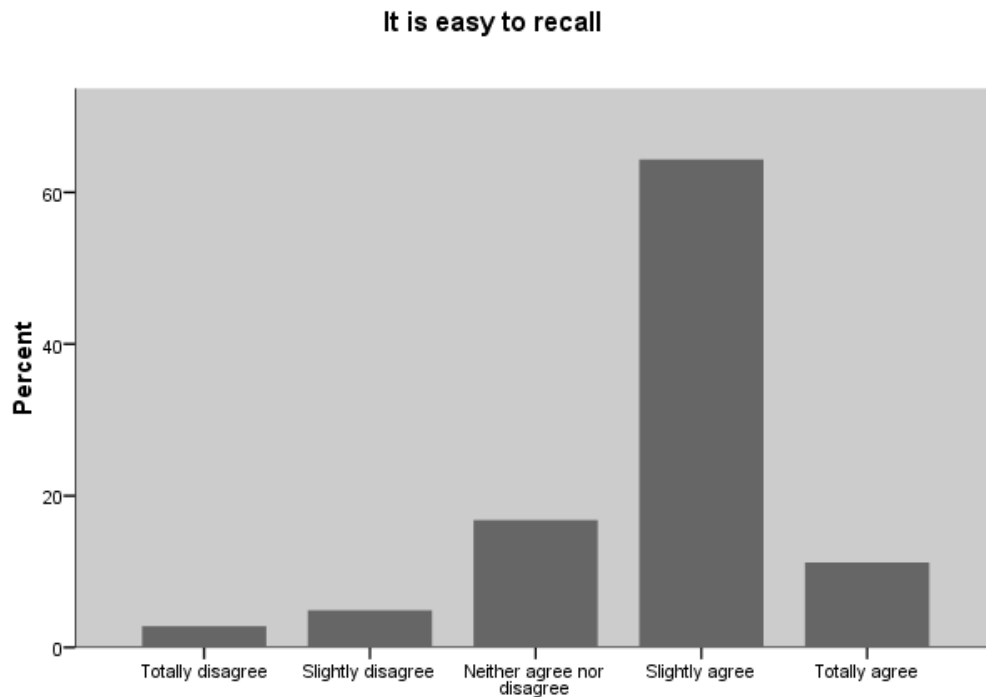


Figure 19. The performance of the brand logo: It is easy to recall

It can be seen from figure 19, nearly 63 percent of respondents slightly agree that the current brand logo is easy to recall, 11 percent of respondents totally agree. In general, nearly 64 percent of respondents can recall the brand logo of Massidea.org in their minds, which means this brand logo has achieved a relatively high level of memorability.

Table 10 shows the results of the investigation on the likability of the brand logo. The likability of this brand element is examined by analyzing respondents' opinions about the brand logo's elegance. It can be seen from table 10, only 23.1 percent of respondents consider the brand logo as an elegant one. On the contrary, 24.5 percent of respondents think that this logo is not elegant enough.

It is elegant

	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Totally disagree	2,1	2,1	2,1
Slightly disagree	22,4	22,4	24,5
Neither agree nor disagree	52,4	52,4	76,9
Slightly agree	21,7	21,7	98,6

Totally agree	1,4	1,4	100,0
Total	100,0	100,0	

Table 10. The performance of the brand logo: It is elegant

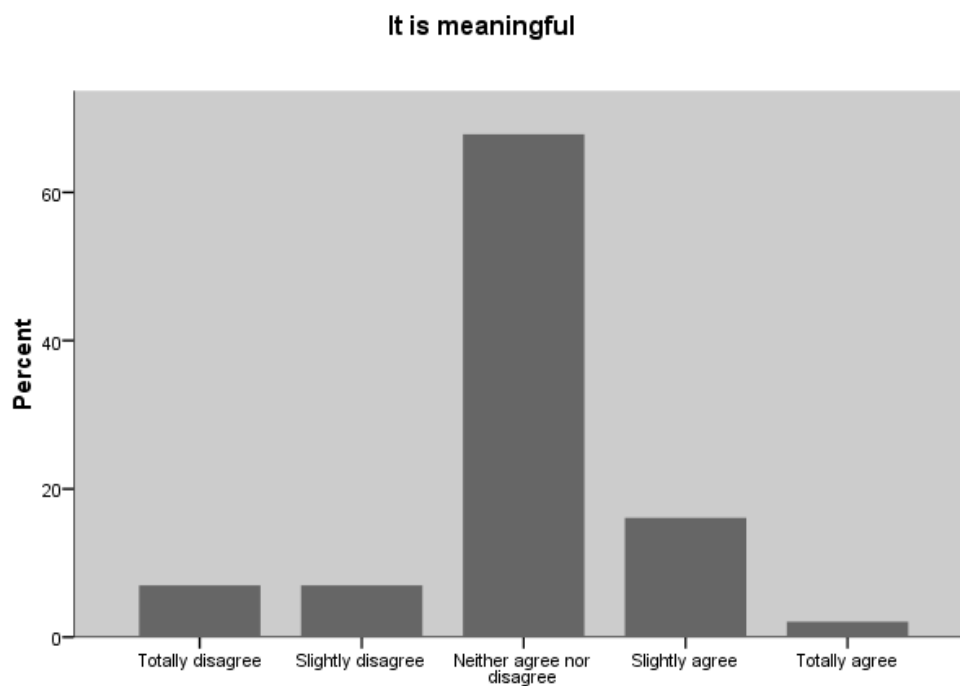


Figure 20. The performance of the brand logo: It is meaningful

Obviously, figure 20 shows that nearly 65 percent of respondents do not have a clear understanding of the meaning of the brand. Only less than 20 percent respondents consider the brand logo of Massidea.org to be a meaningful one. In Professor Keller's opinion (2008, 156), although abstract logos are quite distinctive and recognizable, in certain cases, consumers may not fully understand what the logo stands for, because an abstract logo lacks the inherent meaning present with a more concrete logo. Based on the research results, it can be said that the current brand logo of Massidea.org is not meaningful enough.

4.1.2.5 Question 5. How do you find the current brand image of Massidea.org?

This question mainly examines the current brand image in respondents' minds. Six alternatives are offered to respondents, for each alternative, respondents are requested to choose an option according to a scale from 1 to 5, in which 1 means "Totally disagree", 2 means "Slightly disagree", 3 means "Neither agree nor disagree", 4 means "Slightly agree" and 5 means

“Totally agree”. Respondents are requested to circle the number from the scale which in the respondent’s opinion best responds to the alternative. These six alternatives are “It is fun”, “It is boring”, “It is helpful”, “It is fashionable”, “It is advanced”, “It is innovative” and “It seems to me that Massidea.org represents a new alternative as a social media platform”.

With regard to these six alternatives, the first three alternatives, namely “It is fun”, “It is boring” and “It is helpful”, are designed to discover what kind of feeling the brand creates in consumers’ minds; the last four, namely “It is fashionable”, “It is advanced”, “It is innovative” and “It seems to me that Massidea.org represents a new alternative as a social media platform”, are designed to examine the brand association in respondents’ minds.

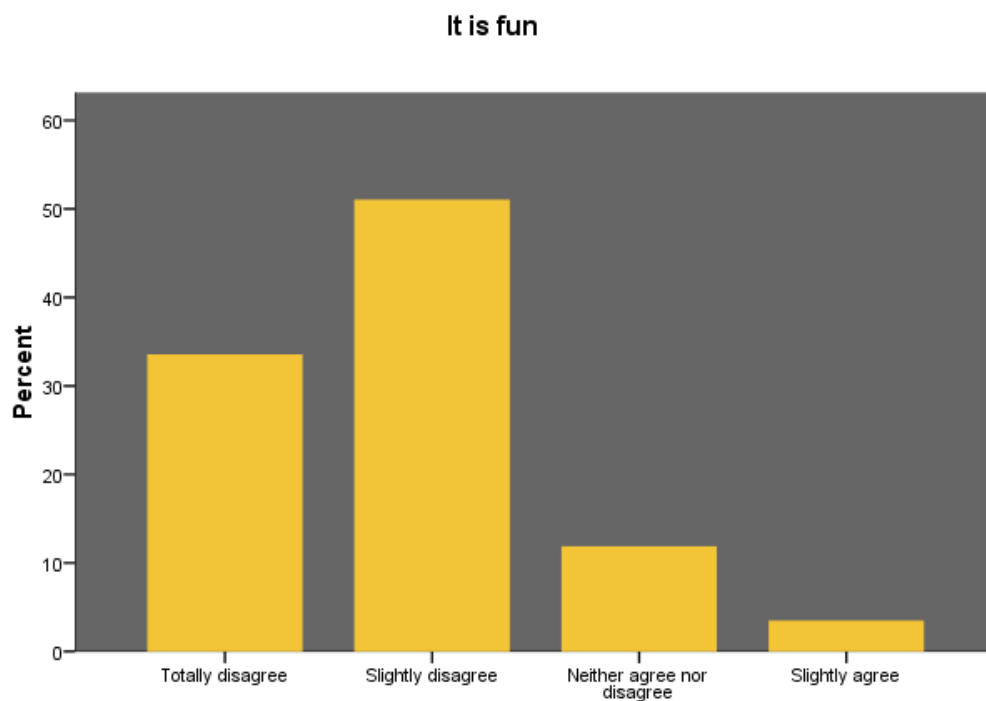


Figure 21. The current brand image of Massidea.org: It is fun

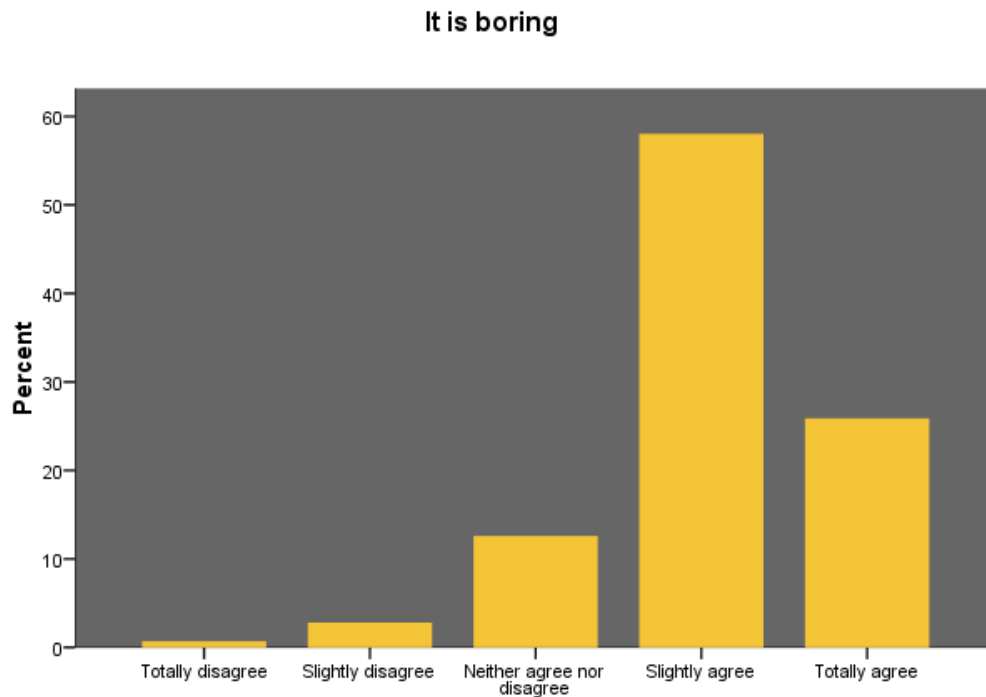


Figure 22. The current brand image of Massidea.org: It is boring

Table 21 and 22 show the results with regard to the feeling which the brand creates in respondents' minds. Visually, it appears to be a relatively negative image. It can be seen from figure 21, more than 85 percent of the respondents disagree that they possess a relatively joyful feeling about Massidea.org. In contrast, Figure 22 shows that 58 percent of respondents slightly agree that they possess a relatively bored feeling about Massidea.org, while nearly 30 percent of respondents totally agree. In other words, almost 80 percent of respondents possess a bored feeling about the brand. This can be considered a huge risk of the current brand image.

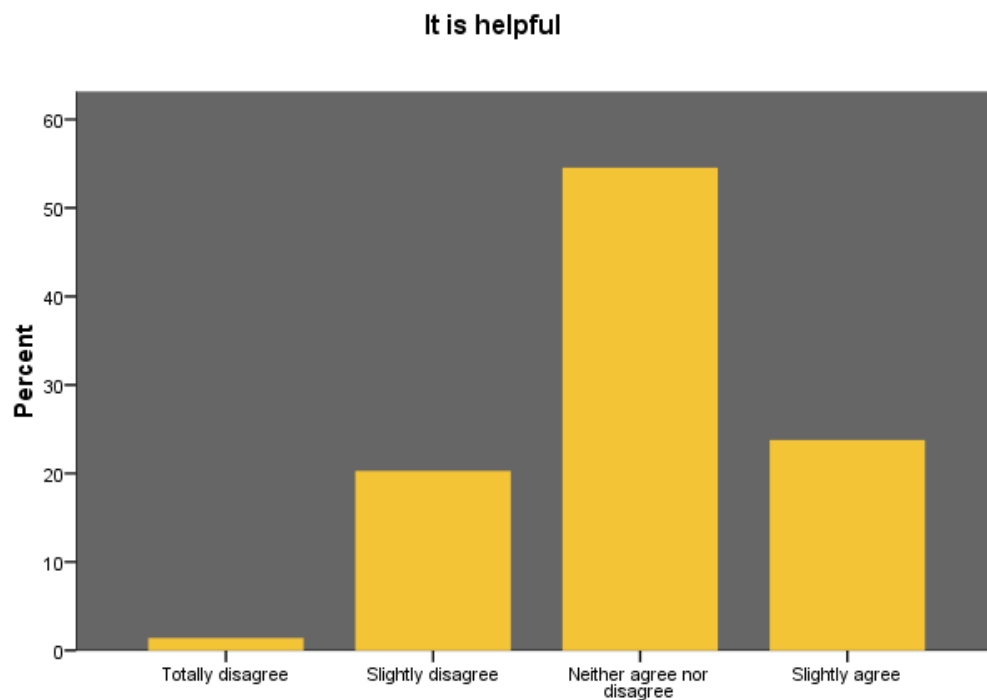


Figure 23. The current brand image of Massidea.org: It is helpful

Figure 23 shows that the number of respondents who agree that they possess a helpful feeling about the brand accounts for 23 percent, this nearly equals the amount of respondents who disagree that they possess a helpful feeling about the brand. More than half of the respondents do not possess any feelings concerning the helpfulness of the brand. Considering most of the respondents have never heard of the brand before this survey, and they do not possess enough brand knowledge related to this alternative, the appearance of this result is inevitable and understandable.

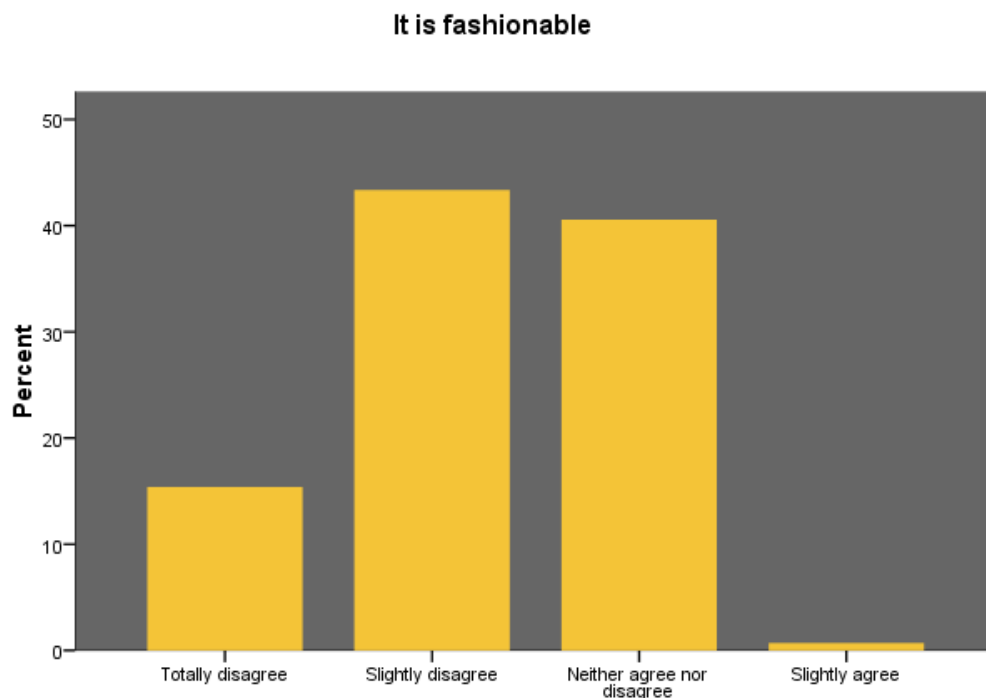


Figure 24. The current brand image of Massidea.org

Figure 24 indicates that nearly 44 percent respondents slightly disagree that they possess a relatively fashionable brand association in their minds. More than 15 percent respondents totally disagree. In general, nearly 60 percent of respondents do not possess any fashion related brand associations in their minds. This means that the service performance of Massidea.org fails to form a relatively fashionable brand association in respondents' minds.

It can be seen from figure 25, 23 percent of respondents disagree that they possess an advanced brand association in their minds. Only 18 percent respondents agree that the brand has created a relatively advanced brand association in their minds. Nearly 60 percent respondents do not possess any brand associations about the brand.

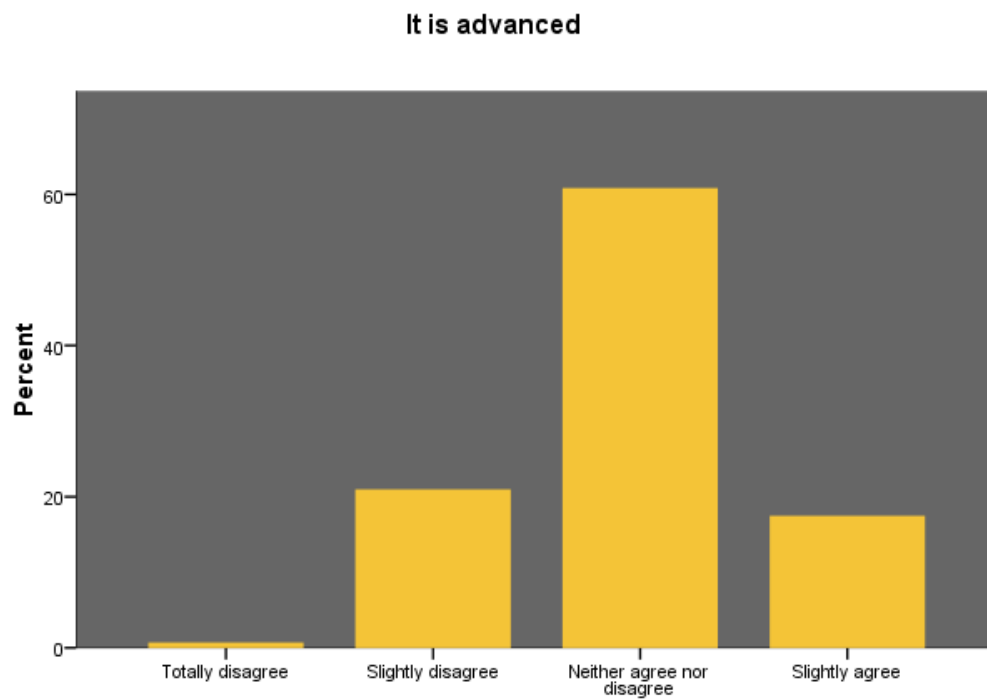


Figure 25. The current brand image of Massidea.org: It is advanced

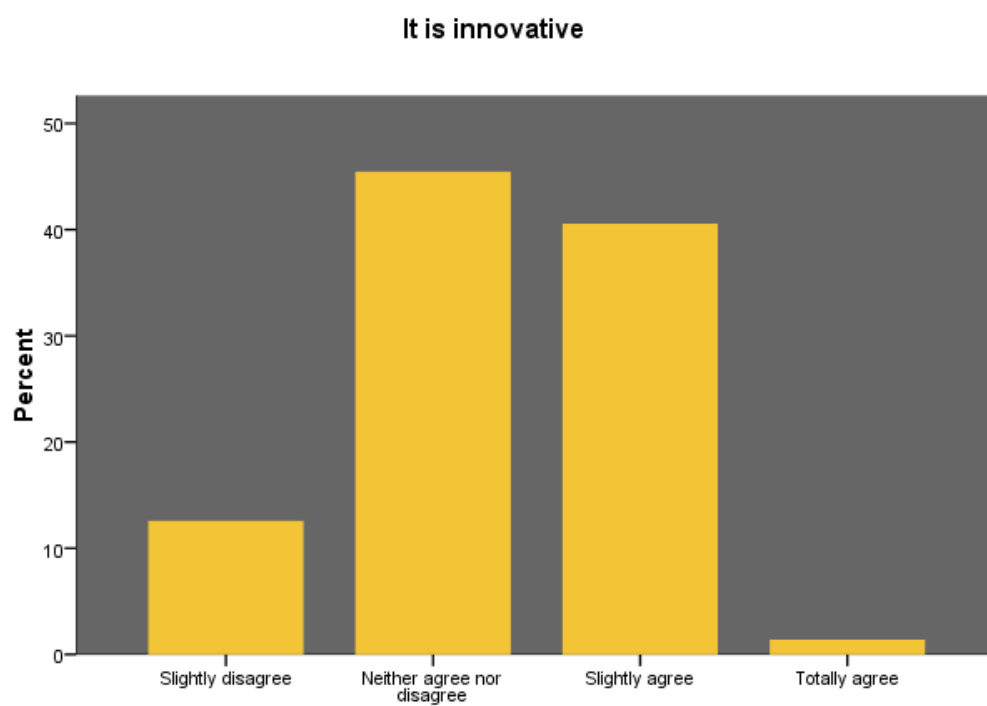


Figure 26. The current brand image of Massidea.org: It is innovative

Nevertheless, figure 26 indicates that 43 percent of respondents agree that they possess a relatively innovative brand association about the brand in their minds. Only less than 15 percent of respondents slightly disagree. 47 percent of respondents do not possess any brand associations in their minds, but this 47 percent of respondents are able to be positively affected with an appropriate marketing initiative.

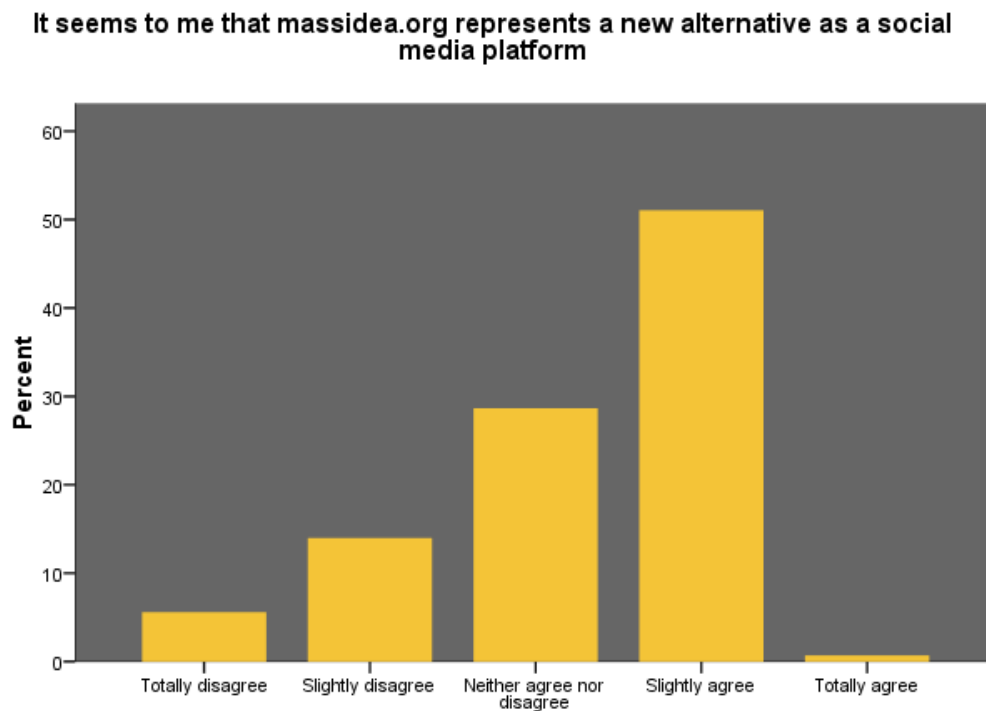


Figure 27. The current brand image of Massidea.org: It seems to me that Massidea.org represents a new alternative as a social media platform

Based on the research results presented above, even though the brand currently has a relatively low level of brand awareness and a negative brand image in respondents' minds, the uniqueness and difference between Massidea.org and other social media platforms is still noticed by the majority of respondents. It can be seen from figure 27 that more than half of the respondents consider Massidea.org a new alternative as a social media platform.

4.1.2.6 Question 6. In general, what should a social media platform be like?

This question is designed to discover what the respondents' expectations are with regard to a social media platform. The results of this question can be utilized as a reference by the case project team in their future development, which means that they are able to update brand elements, improve service performance, and ultimately create a relatively positive brand image in users' minds by making references to the results of this question. Seven different

alternatives are offered to respondents, for each alternative, respondents are requested to choose an option according to a scale from 1 to 5, in which 1 means “Totally disagree”, 2 means “Slightly disagree”, 3 means “Neither agree nor disagree”, 4 means “Slightly agree” and 5 means “Totally agree”. Respondents are requested to circle the number from the scale which in the respondent’s opinion best responds to the alternative. These seven alternatives are “It should be fun”, “It should be free in contents”, “It should be constructive”, “It should be user-friendly”, “It should trigger people’s creativity”, “It should help users gain more attention”, and “It should help people promote themselves to the public”.

It should be fun

	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Neither agree nor disagree	2,8	2,8	2,8
Slightly agree	48,3	48,3	51,0
Totally agree	49,0	49,0	100,0
Total	100,0	100,0	

Table 11. Users’ expectations about Massidea.org: It should be fun

Without doubt, in a student group, almost all respondents expect that a social media platform will offer them a joyful user experience. It can be seen from table 11 that 48.3 percent of respondents slightly agree that a social media platform, such as Massidea.org should be fun. And 49 percent of them totally agree with it. In other words, 97.3 percent of respondents agree that being fun is the first attribute a social media platform should possess.

It should be free in contents

	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Slightly disagree	15,4	15,4	15,4
Neither agree nor disagree	20,3	20,3	35,7
Slightly agree	37,1	37,1	72,7
Totally agree	27,3	27,3	100,0
Total	100,0	100,0	

Table 12. Users’ expectations about Massidea.org: It should be free in contents

Table 12 shows the analyzing results concerning the limitations on contents. 37.1 percent of

respondents slightly agree that a social media platform should offer a totally free environment in which users can post contents without limitations. 27.3 percent of respondents totally agree with that. In general, 64.4 percent of respondents prefer a totally free environment when posting their contents in a social media platform.

It should be constructive

	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Slightly disagree	,7	,7	,7
Neither agree nor disagree	30,1	30,1	30,8
Slightly agree	52,4	52,4	83,2
Totally agree	16,8	16,8	100,0
Total	100,0	100,0	

Table 13. Users' expectations about Massidea.org: It should be constructive

Table 13 indicates that the majority of respondents enjoy a relatively constructive environment within a social media platform. It can be seen from the table, 69.2 percent of respondents agree that a social media platform should be constructive for users.

It should trigger people's creativity

	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Slightly disagree	11,2	11,2	11,2
Neither agree nor disagree	37,1	37,1	48,3
Slightly agree	35,7	35,7	83,9
Totally agree	16,1	16,1	100,0
Total	100,0	100,0	

Table 14. Users' expectations about Massidea.org: It should trigger people's creativity

It can be seen from table 14 that 35.7 percent of respondents slightly agree that a social media platform should trigger users' creativity. 16.1 percent of them totally agree with it. Generally speaking, more than half of the respondents prefer a creative environment when using a social media platform.

It should be user-friendly

	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Slightly agree	17,5	17,5	17,5
Totally agree	82,5	82,5	100,0
Total	100,0	100,0	

Table 15. Users' expectations about Massidea.org: It should be user-friendly

Table 15 shows the significance of creating a user-friendly environment for users in a social media platform. In this table, the result shows that 82.5 percent of respondents totally agree that a social media platform should be user-friendly, 17.5 percent of respondents slightly agree with it. Thus 100 percent of respondents, namely 143 of them expect that a social media platform such as Massidea.org can be user-friendly.

It should help users gain more attention

	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Totally disagree	1,4	1,4	1,4
Slightly disagree	5,6	5,6	7,0
Neither agree nor disagree	12,6	12,6	19,6
Slightly agree	57,3	57,3	76,9
Totally agree	23,1	23,1	100,0
Total	100,0	100,0	

Table 16. Users' expectations about Massidea.org: It should help users gain more attention

It should help people promote themselves to the public

	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Totally disagree	2,8	2,8	2,8
Slightly disagree	4,2	4,2	7,0
Neither agree nor disagree	16,8	16,8	23,8
Slightly agree	56,6	56,6	80,4
Totally agree	19,6	19,6	100,0
Total	100,0	100,0	

Table 17. Users' expectations about Massidea.org: It should help people promote themselves to the public

The results presented both in table 16 and 17 can be interpreted in the same manner, namely the majority of respondents expect that a social media platform is able to help them expand their social networks, make more friends, and marketing themselves. It can be seen from table 16, 80.4 percent of respondents agree that a social media platform should play a role in helping users gain more attention. Table 17 shows that 76.2 percent of respondents agree that a social media platform should help users promote themselves to the public.

Generally speaking, the results of question 6 offer a clear picture which shows how and what a successful social media platform should be for students. To summarize, in respondents' opinions, a social media platform, which is fun, constructive, user-friendly, able to trigger users' creativity, able to help users gain more attention and marketing themselves, can be considered a successful one.

4.1.3 Part 3. Research Statistics

This part is expressly designed for the final research statistics. In order to provide readers with detailed background information about the research, a breakdown of the results according to the sex ratio and numbers of respondents at different places will be presented.

4.1.3.1 Question 1. Gender

Gender

	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	55,9	55,9	55,9
Female	44,1	44,1	100,0
Total	100,0	100,0	

Table 18. Gender: sex ratio of this research

Table 18 shows that sex ratio of this research. Among all 143 respondents, nearly 56 percent of respondents are males, and 44 percent of them are females.

4.1.3.2 Question 2. Respondents' numbers and studying or working places

Studying place

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Laurea University of Applied Sciences	83	58,0	58,0	58,0
Tampere University of Applied Sciences	21	14,7	14,7	72,7
Humanistinen University of Applied Sciences	39	27,3	27,3	100,0
Total	143	100,0	100,0	

Table 19. Numbers of respondents at different places

As mentioned above, this research was conducted at three different places. Table 19 shows that 58 percent of respondents, namely 83 of them are students in Laurea University of Applied Sciences, and this is also the largest respondent group in this research. Only 14.7 percent of respondents, namely 21 of them are students in Tampere University of Applied Sciences, thus making them the smallest respondent group in this research. 39 respondents are students in Humanistinen University of Applied Sciences, this number accounts for 39 percent of all respondents.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the results presented above, there are certain conclusions and recommendations which are essential to be discussed with regard to three major aspects, namely building brand equity online, enhancing brand awareness and creating positive brand image.

5.1 Conclusion

With regard to the aspect of building brand equity online, it is believed that the Internet, in this case, can be utilized as a primary tool both in brand building and marketing. According to the results which are presented in table 6 and 7, among students, the Internet has achieved a high level of acceptance and frequency of utilization. This indicates that applying the Internet as a primary tool for branding and marketing is better at reaching students as a target user group.

Concerning the brand awareness of Massidea.org, figure 8 shows that currently this brand has a relatively low level of brand awareness among students. There are two major factors which are able to affect the level of brand awareness. The first is the performance of brand elements, the second is the utilization of multiple marketing communication tools. In this case, the results indicate that all brand elements, namely the brand name, brand slogan, and brand logo

are able to meet at least two criteria of Professor Keller's six criteria of choosing brand elements, namely memorability, likability, meaningfulness, transferability, adaptability, and protectability. Thus the major problem which jeopardizes the level of brand awareness is the lack of utilization of multiple marketing communication tools. Because the major sources of brand awareness are brand recognition and brand recall. Enhancing these two sources of brand awareness relies on the repeated exposure of brand elements implemented by certain marketing communication tools.

The results also indicate that Massidea.org currently possesses a relatively negative brand image among students. Most of the respondents associate Massidea.org with bored and unfashionable feelings, nevertheless, nearly half of respondents noticed the uniqueness and difference between Massidea.org and other social media platform, therefore they consider Massidea.org to a new alternative of social media platform. This symptom hints that in order to forming a positive brand image in students' minds, it is critical for the case project team to re-position the brand, and maintain the uniqueness of the brand while trying to creating a more positive brand image.

5.2 Recommendations

As this is the first research with regard to the brand awareness and brand image of Massidea.org, it is highly recommended that the level of brand awareness and the status of brand image could be researched again in the years to come. Because it is believed that the level of brand awareness and the status of brand image will vary as time goes by, it is also recommended that the same research should be implemented regularly, with the same method, the same target group, and same research questions asked. By doing so the researchers are able to reveal how the brand image varies and develops. If it is possible, certain brand awareness and image related research should be conducted yearly, especially in fast-paced computer-related industries, it is sufficient to conduct a brand awareness and image research every six months.

In order to achieve a high level of brand awareness, it is currently popular to apply more marketing communication tools increasing the repeated exposure of brand elements. If necessary, current brand elements can be updated and certain new brand elements are able to be utilized in order to achieve a relatively high level of brand recognition and brand recall. Before trying to create a positive brand image, it would be favourable to improve the service performance of Massidea.org first, because, according to Peter Cheverton (2006, 4), branding is not about offering an inferior product or service with surface images.

5.3 Theoretical Linkages

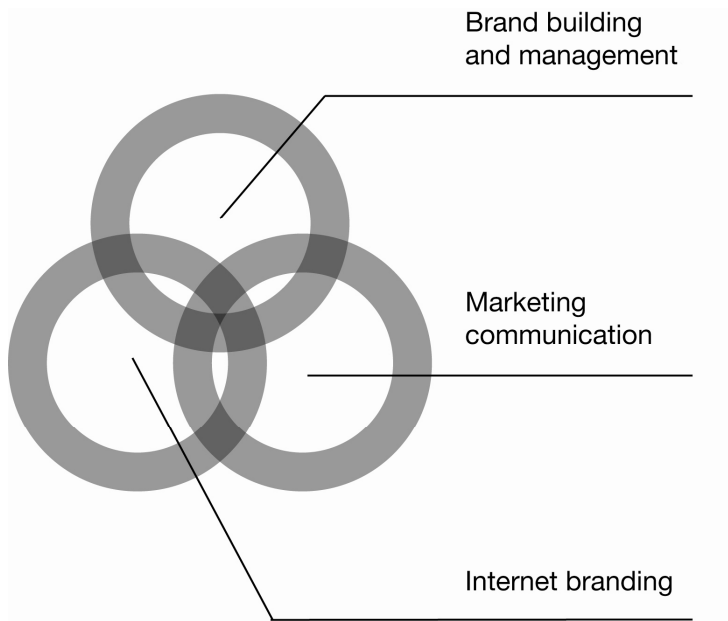


Figure 28 Theoretical linkages in this thesis

In order to create strong literature based theoretical linkages which can be properly linked to the research question, namely to discover how to create a strong brand equity by creating a high level of brand awareness and strong, favorable and positive brand image via utilizing internet as a tool, which supported by other marketing communication options, three major study fields are referred to in the theoretical part of this thesis. As figure 28 shows, each part links to each other. It starts with the discussion from the perspective of brand building and management, it is mainly about the basic concept of brand, brand equity, the sources of brand equity which consist of brand awareness and brand image, and certain options and tactics to strengthen these two sources. The discussion about the advantages, values, and possibilities to build a strong brand on the Internet is conducted in the middle of the theoretical part. The last part of the theoretical background refers to other marketing communication options which can be adopted as assistant forces to enhance the two sources of brand equity online. Generally speaking, the chosen theories in the theoretical discussion properly matches the empirical study.

6. Summary

Currently, due to the deveopment of technologies and the application of the Internet, a free and global environment for the exchange flow of information has been built. Thus enables the mass production of the same production of the same products to be implemented by any manufacturer and the same service to be offered in most places in the world. Companies are no longer able to obtain competitive advantages by only producing products or offering services

but by branding to add more value to their products and services.

As a newly introduced social media platform, which is developed based on the crowd-sourcing theory and expressly designed and crafted for users from all over the world to share their daily challenges, ideas and visions of the future, as well as help users to expand their social networks, Massidea.org will face an inevitable competition with other companies that provide similar services. In order to obtain more competitive advantages than other competitors, it is critical for Massidea.org to build a strong brand and accumulate more added value to its own service which is offered under the brand. The purpose of this thesis is to discover how to build and strengthen the brand equity for Massidea.org within the Internet environment.

A relatively strong and sustainable brand depends on its strong brand equity. One way to build strong brand equity relies on its two major sources, namely a high level of brand awareness, and a strong, favourable brand image in consumers' minds. A relatively high level of brand awareness can be achieved by utilizing multiple marketing communication tools to deliver the brand knowledge and brand personality which can be carried by certain well designed brand elements, including logos, symbols, jingles, characters etc to potential consumers; a strong, and favourable brand image can be created through positive brand associations. Considering the major feature of Massidea.org, namely the fact that it is a service platform online, it is necessary for Massidea.org to consider and utilize the Internet as an effective tool to enhance its brand awareness and form a favourable brand image. Compared to other traditional marketing and communication media, the Internet is better at reaching more targeted people globally, and it is also able to offer a more interactive environment to users rather than acting predominantly as a push media to deliver the brand knowledge and brand personality in a monologue manner.

When building brand equity by enhancing its two major sources on the Internet environment, it is favourable to consider and adopt certain supportive marketing communication tools to facilitate and precipitate the building process of brand equity. These supportive tools include advertising, promotion, event marketing, sponsorship, public relations, and publicity.

The research results of this thesis reveals that currently Massidea.org has achieved a relatively low level of brand awareness and its public image is relatively inferior and negative. The main reasons for these problematic symptoms include the lack of utilization of multiple effective marketing communication options and the faulty performance of the service under the brand name.

Based on the research results, it is recommended that Massidea.org realizes the value and the importance of utilizing the Internet for branding, as well as to utilize other supportive

marketing communication tools. Nevertheless, only relying on a high level of brand awareness and a strong, favourable public image will not be able to guarantee the success of the brand, its service performance, namely the core of the positive brand image, should be improved properly in the future.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire



Questionnaire to evaluate students' and teachers' attitude toward the Internet as a tool for brand matters, and brand image and brand awareness of Massidea.org among students and teachers.

1. About this survey

This is a survey launched by Ningfeng Zhang, a student from Laurea University of Applied Sciences, on behalf of Massidea.org project team for the author's thesis. The main aim of this questionnaire is to inquire your view on the Internet as one of marketing and communication tools, and the brand image and brand awareness, as an active user or a potential user of Massidea.org.

2. About social media platform and Massidea.org

Concerning that certain respondents who will be considered the potential users of Massidea.org, might access to the concept of social media platform and Massidea.org at the first time, a short brief of them will be presented to those respondents as follow:

2.1 What is online social media platform?

Online social media platform, also often known as online social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and Youtube etc, generally refer to those online communities and hosted online services which will facilitate the collaboration, creation and exchange of user-generated contents. Online social media platform facilitates the interaction among users in specific territory or from all over the world by providing them with a dynamic platform in which versatile services, such as discussions, sharing of multimedia contents and information, can be enabled. If respondents would like to know more, please access to the website www.massidea.org.

2.2 What is Massidea.org?

Massidea.org is an online social media platform which is based on crowd-sourcing theory and expressly designed and crafted for users all over the world to share their daily challenges, ideas

and visions of the future. By doing so, users' creativity will be boosted and users' social networks will be expended. It is a project funded by European Social Fund (ESF) and firstly initiated in 2008. Massidea.org is the 1st social media platform in Finland which is created for not only socializing and online communication but also for solving people's daily problem and boosting individuals' creativity by information exchange among the others. By the end of 2009, 9 partner universities of applied sciences and 3 partner universities have involved within this project.

3. Guideline for answering

For respondents, even if certain questions may seem redundant or repetitive, there are important subtle differences in the way they are formulated. Please be patient till the end of this questionnaire and your answer will be quite important and highly valued for the consequences of this survey.

4. Term of confidentiality

The research data collected with this survey questionnaire will be held as confidential material and therefore we will not publish respondents' specific information to anybody outside of the research team.

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation!

Part 1. Survey on your attitude toward the Internet

Q1. Do you consider that Internet as one of the most important tools for your daily working tasks and studies?

A. Yes

B. No

Q2. how often do you use the Internet?

A. once a day

B. several times a day

C. once a week

D. several times a week

E. I do not use Internet at all

Q4. Please state how much do you agree with the following statements by circling the right alternative (1 = Totally disagree / 2 = Slightly disagree / 3 = Neither agree nor disagree / 4 = Slightly agree / 5 = Totally agree):

Nowadays, Internet can be considered to be the most effective marketing tool.

1 2 3 4 5

Nowadays, Internet can be considered to be the most effective communication tool.

1 2 3 4 5

Compare to all traditional marketing channels, such as TV commercials, printing materials, newspapers etc, Internet is better at reaching the targeted population.

1 2 3 4 5

Internet is the best choice in brand building of a social media platform such as massidea.org.

1 2 3 4 5

Internet is the best choice in marketing a social media platform such as massidea.org.

1 2 3 4 5

Part 2. Survey towards the brand awareness and brand image of Massidea.org (Before you start this part, please take few minutes to scan over the website of Massidea.org, namely www.massidea.org and experience the service with which Massidea.org provide you)

Q1. About “Massidea.org”

- A. I have never heard of it before this survey
- B. I have heard of it at school but I have no idea what it is all about
- C. I have experience in trying it
- D. It is a familiar brand to me

Q2. How do you find the brand name “Massidea.org”?

Please state how much do you agree with the following statements by circling the right alternative (1 = Totally disagree / 2 = Slightly disagree / 3 = Neither agree nor disagree / 4 =

Slightly agree / 5 = Totally agree):

It is complicated

1 2 3 4 5

It is simple

1 2 3 4 5

It is easy to recall

1 2 3 4 5

It is easy to pronounce

1 2 3 4 5

It is elegant

1 2 3 4 5

It is meaningful

1 2 3 4 5

Q3. How do you find the slogan “smashing ideas” of Massidea.org?

Please state how much do you agree with the following statements by circling the right alternative (1 = Totally disagree / 2 = Slightly disagree / 3 = Neither agree nor disagree / 4 = Slightly agree / 5 = Totally agree):

It is simple

1 2 3 4 5

It is meaningful

1 2 3 4 5

It is confusing

1 2 3 4 5

It is easy to recall

1 2 3 4 5

Q3. How do you find the brand logo of Massidea.org?

Please state how much do you agree with the following statements by circling the right alternative (1 = Totally disagree / 2 = Slightly disagree / 3 = Neither agree nor disagree / 4 = Slightly agree / 5 = Totally agree):



It is simple

1 2 3 4 5

It is elegant

1 2 3 4 5

It is easy to recognize

1 2 3 4 5

It is meaningful

1 2 3 4 5

It is easy to recall

1 2 3 4 5

Q4. How do you find the current brand image of Massidea.org?

Please state how much do you agree with the following statements by circling the right alternative (1 = Totally disagree / 2 = Slightly disagree / 3 = Neither agree nor disagree / 4 = Slightly agree / 5 = Totally agree):

It is fun

1 2 3 4 5

It is boring

1 2 3 4 5

It is helpful

1 2 3 4 5

It is fashionable

1 2 3 4 5

It is advanced

1 2 3 4 5

It is innovative

1 2 3 4 5

It seems to me that Massidea.org represents a new alternative as a social media platform

1 2 3 4 5

Q5. In general, what should a social media platform be like?

Please state how much do you agree with the following statements by circling the right alternative (1 = Totally disagree / 2 = Slightly disagree / 3 = Neither agree nor disagree / 4 = Slightly agree / 5 = Totally agree):

It should be fun

1 2 3 4 5

It should be free in contents

1 2 3 4 5

It should be constructive

1 2 3 4 5

It should be user-friendly

1 2 3 4 5

It should trigger peoples' creativity

1 2 3 4 5

It should help users gain more attention

1 2 3 4 5

It should help people promote themselves to the public

1 2 3 4 5

Part 3. Please tell something about yourself

Q1. Your age: _____

Q2. Your position

A. student B. teacher C.Other

Q3. Your gender:

A. Male

B. Female

Q3. Your working / studying place:_____

Thank you very much for your time and attention!

Your answer and personal information will be held as confidential material and will not be published. If you have any queries about this survey, please feel free to contact the undersigned via Email or telephone, contact information will be listed to you as follow:

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